An investigation of excess as symptomatic of Neo-Baroque identified in the work of selected South African artists

by

Lisa Greyvenstein

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An investigation of excess as symptomatic of Neo-Baroque identified in the work of selected South African artists.

Abstract:

This research investigates the Neo-Baroque aesthetic of excess in contemporary South African art, and explores reasons for the emergence of this style. It investigates artists who use their bodies as a site of resistance, to contest or reconstruct the dominant social values which establish differences between bodies to place them within the marginal position of 'Other'. This investigation relates to post-colonial concerns. The artists' exploitation of the Neo-Baroque aesthetic of excess as a comment on social concerns reveals a sense of crisis within South African society, similar to the conditions from which the seventeenth century Baroque style evolved. Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess manifest in a variety of ways, and are particularly evident when artists transgress social boundaries placed on the body through abject and erotic associations. Excess ultimately arises from complexity, as hybrid art forms are created from the combination of media and content found within the art work.

Key terms:

abject; Baroque; body politics; Cohen, Steven; contemporary South African art; cultural resistance; eroticism; excess; Farber, Leora; Hlobo, Nicholas; hybrid; Mntambo, Nandipha; new media; Neo-Baroque; new media; Other; post-colonialism; Rose, Tracey; spectacle; Vari, Minette.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In contemporary South African art, a Neo-Baroque[1] aesthetic of excess appears to be on the increase. In support of post-colonial[2] ideals, Neo-Baroque characteristics serve to cultivate a context for cultural resistance in order to accommodate a more inclusive, socially mixed scenario of contemporary South African culture. These issues find expression in excessive layers of meaning and aesthetics, which often become a means of transgression employed by the artist working within a Neo-Baroque style. South African artists, in the light of political and economic changes, have taken to using the body as a method of expressing social concerns through excess as a form of resistance to current social conditions.

1.1 **Premise and aims of the research**

This dissertation investigates the Neo-Baroque use of excess in contemporary South African artworks which explores the body or bodily forms. It will be shown that a number of South African artists who work with themes related to the body are incorporating Neo-Baroque characteristics of excess[3] to draw attention to post-colonial concerns relating to body politics, which remain unresolved as racial, gender, and sexual discrimination still persists within society. Baroque[4] characteristics found within South African art reveal a Neo-Baroque aesthetic of excess, which manifests in various ways as a form of resistance to contest social concerns through transgression.

Neo-Baroque as an art style is still relatively unexplored, both globally and even more so in South African art, demonstrating a need for the current study as this art style could open up alternative avenues for artists to discover. In addition, artists who, consciously or unknowingly, already engage Neo-Baroque aesthetics in conjunction with body politics reveal a concern for current social conditions. After more than two decades of democracy, many believe these social issues to have been resolved. However, the fact that artists are still expressing concern about body politics suggests that these have merely been camouflaged by dominant ideologies.

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[1] Neo-Baroque is a contemporary art style. The term "Neo-Baroque" refers here to its usage by Angela Ndalianis and Omar Calabrese.

[2] Post-colonialism is a theory embedded in identity politics, such as race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. The term for the purpose of this study refers specifically to the art produced in countries that where once colonized by another country, in this case, South Africa.

[3] Excess here refers to an abundance of detail and information to the point of becoming too much. In a Neo-Baroque context, the term "excess", as used by Calabrese (1992:49), describes the overcoming of systems boundaries.

[4] Baroque is a term used to describe a particular artistic style associated with the seventeenth century, which will be discussed indepth in chapter two.

In the context of South Africa's everyday environment, the body and bodily differences are accumulated and emphasized through visual representations (Jones 1993:202). Bodies which are seen as different to the norm are fixed into a position of inferiority or 'Other'[5] to validate their omission from society. Artists who feel that they are being marginalised as a result of their bodily differences try to make their identities understood through exposing such politics of difference. I intend to examine specifically how the post-colonial investigation of bodily difference or the Other over the last few decades has been formed by a system which has been organised to benefit dominant social ideals. Further, this research will aim to reveal how current discourses promote the idea of improvement and equality while still resuming colonial ideals used to classify the Other. It will then be established whether or not South African artists are turning to the Neo-Baroque art style as a means of expressing these concerns, in some cases as a form of resistance.

In addition, the research will examine how a number of Neo-Baroque art forms combine Baroque excess aesthetics with post-colonial ideals to comment on unresolved social issues related to the body. In some works, like those of Steven Cohen (b.1962), the use of excess arises from the abundance of detail and complexity, and in the extravagance of the work. The work of other artists, such as Nandipha Mntambo (b.1982), may at first appear simpler. On closer inspection, any number of implied layers of meanings are revealed, most often to the point of excess and becoming transgressive. Other artists relevant to this study include Nicholas Hlobo (b.1975), Tracey Rose (b.1974), Minnette Vári (b.1968), and Leora Farber (b.1964), all of whom use Neo-Baroque aesthetics in their work to deliver social commentary about themselves and the body.

Neo-Baroque artistic trends may also reveal a tendency among artists to combine various media and forms, as well as the old and the new (Salgado 1999:322 & Ndalianis 2004:[sp]). Artists like Cohen and Mntambo create hybrid art forms by combining new digital media and technologies with various visual culture references to create spectacle and engulf the viewer in the display. This aspect of the Neo-Baroque will be analysed and discussed in this study in terms of its use of excess, in particular the human body against a broader background of body politics involving notions of the gaze, the abject, and the erotic. Neo-Baroque and post-colonial approaches to issues relating to body politics will be compared and explored, specifically within a South African context.

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[5]Here, the 'Other' is defined according to colonial value systems, as all bodies different to the white heterosexual male. The term is used in this context as it is believed that the colonial ideals are still being hidden and implemented in South African society.

In summary, this dissertation will explore five topics. Firstly, the research will attempt to establish the emergence of the Neo-Baroque style in South Africa, especially among artists who work with themes relating to the body and their concern for excess. Secondly, it aims to ascertain what is revealed about South African society by its artists' use of the Neo-Baroque style in combination with excess, as well as their purposes for such an approach. Thirdly, the main argument of the paper, will investigate whether artists are combining stylistic characteristics associated with a Neo-Baroque aesthetic with dominant discourses of post-colonialism so as to construct sites for cultural resistance, and the reasons for such an approach will be interrogated. Fourthly, the paper aims to determine whether artists are displaying Neo-Baroque characteristics in order to express a sense of crisis in a similar way to the artists of the Baroque eras. Lastly, it will attempt to substantiate whether Neo-Baroque hybrid forms allow for the expression of a more inclusive South African culture.

1.2 Theoretical Background

For the purposes of this mini-dissertation, Neo-Baroque will be treated as an artistic style which is currently rising in contemporary South African art, as well as influencing diverse artistic practices ranging from traditional forms of painting and sculpture, to conceptual formats like installation and performance, and progressive media such as video and digital formats. Neo-Baroque's extravagance, excess and aesthetic beauty openly go against the minimalist and conceptual control of postmodernism and the artistic practices of the last decades of the twentieth century (Neo/Baroque 2005:[sp]).

The Neo-Baroque style and the Baroque have a similar fascination with spectacle and sensory stimulation (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]). According to Angela Ndalianis (2004:[sp]), artists classified as working within the Neo-Baroque genre often compose their work in ways that are similar to the dynamism of the seventeenth century Baroque art style[6], but express it differently in terms of technology and culture. Genre analysis reveals that these artists merge various media and references to produce new hybrid art forms. It is important to note that Ndalianis is a primary source in this investigation who discusses the Neo-Baroque style predominantly in the context of film. Ndalianis's views on the Neo-Baroque style in film will, for the purposes of this mini-dissertation, be applied to South African art.

Baroque is a term which originated in the seventeenth century and is currently associated with a specific art style. According to Robert Wallace (1970:11), 'Baroque' was originally a

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[6]The baroque style is a highly ornate form of art which describes the art and culture of the time. This manner of art making took on a variety of characteristics, influenced by social and political changes, as well as scientific discoveries during that period.

derogatory term in Europe, describing an art of bad taste. The style produced a variety of visual products in different countries throughout central Europe, including Italy, Holland, France, and Spain (Martin 1977:12). The term Baroque in art implies excessive extravagance, virtuosity and the bizarre, which are used to rouse the viewer's emotions and senses (Wallace 1970:11&Ndalianis 2005:7). This style is concerned with complex, dynamic movement and multiple perspectives which are dependent on the viewer's position in relation to the artwork. The artists from this stylistic period such as Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) and Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio (1573-1609) were fascinated with aspects of spectacle and illusion awakened by the scientific and technological advances in optics that pushed the boundaries of human understanding to new levels (Martin 1977:12&Ndalianis [sa]).

There are many similarities between the Baroque and Neo-Baroque, found not only in the handling and utility of formal characteristics, but also in their emphasis on the spectacular which is used to actively engage the viewer (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]). Neo-Baroque, much like the Baroque, reveals a fascination with spectacle and sensory stimulation which has arisen from developments in digital technology and electronic media. The most significant difference between Baroque and Neo-Baroque is their use of new media, i.e. the digital media currently available to artists did not exist during the Baroque period. It is worth noting that most writings on the usage of new media in the Neo-Baroque context have centred on film and animation rather than the visual arts, especially in relation to South African art. Celia de Villiers (2008) however discusses various performance artists within a Neo-Baroque context[7].

Neo-Baroque discourse highlights a cultural change when applied to the South African context, which draws attention to the racial mix rather than being solely consigned to western cultural outlines. According to César Augusto Salgado (1999:316), the Neo-Baroque in Latin America reveals a reflection of the culture moving towards a more 'emancipating, self-sufficient, and trans-cultural way of life'. This investigation will attempt to establish whether the use of Neo-Baroque in South Africa may be used by artists in a similar way to reveal a more inclusive and fair reflection of their own society and culture. Various aspects of the Baroque stylistic characteristics are combined with dominant discourses of post-colonialism and postmodernism to produce a context for cultural opposition and reconstruction. This is achieved through the combination of hybrid symbols and signs from various aspects of culture and society within the artworks.

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[7] De Villiers (2008) includes Steven Cohen in her research amongst other international performance artists.

The notion of the hybrid highlights differences which are maintained and hidden within the dominant culture, as an act of resistance expressed in a Baroque style (Salgado 1999:318). These new hybrid forms contribute to the spectacle, combining various materials, new technologies, and cultural references used to draw the viewer's attention (Ndalianis 2004), making it difficult to distinguish between reality and representation (Degli-Esposti 1996b:78). This allows for the expression of a more comprehensive and social blend of culture (Salgado 1999:319) to be demonstrated in this investigation around the Neo-Baroque in South African art. Salgado's (1993) writings on the Neo-Baroque style as a form of cultural resistance, is an interesting concept as he applies it to art in Latin America. If this approach to art truly represents a more inclusive society that promotes equality, then it could be worth considering in South African art. The application of these ideas could open original avenues of creative exploration for artists and researchers.

Baroque styles have arisen at times of difficulties that affect artistic creation (Degli-Esposti 1996b:77). The tendency to revert to the Baroque style is most apparent when confusion and rejection create unease, reveal conflicting outlooks within society, and when the only assurance seems to be that everything is doubtful due to political and economic changes (Degli-Esposti 1996b:77). It is my opinion that South Africa is going through such a crisis in this post-colonial era and that contemporary artists here are displaying Neo-Baroque trends to express their confused and uncertain states of mind about their identities and the country. Through spectacle and shock, artists are renewing public interest around the particular social concerns that they feel strongly about. It will be discussed in chapter three whether South Africa is experiencing some sort of crisis and if this has resulted in the emergence of the Neo-Baroque in South African art.

According to Cristina Degli-Esposti (1996b:78), there is a typical method used by postmodern artists which requires self-analysis and self-parody. This is being incorporated with Baroque effects like mirroring, repetition, staging, labyrinth, narrative, distortion, metamorphism, carnivalisation, contradiction, instability, disorder, detail, and fragmentation, which, on viewing and interpretation, accentuate and call attention to excess (Degli-Esposti 1996b:76). The excessiveness of the details within the artwork combines to produce an effect of estrangement and separation from previous aesthetic forms, which can create a sense of astonishment within the viewer, much like with Baroque art (Degli-Esposti 1996b:81). Neo-Baroque artists typically morph forms and layers of references in an attempt to both place the viewer at a distance yet

draw their interest, perhaps astounding them. This can create the sense of the uncanny[8], as it is both familiar and disturbing at the same time. The idea of limitlessness through excess allows for the trespassing and breaking of boundaries. This is achieved most often by referencing social taboos as a means of overcoming social limits through excess and at the same time drawing on the uncanny.

Art works are filled with numerous details and inferential signs, carrying a number of implications and interpretations that place emphasis on the overindulgence of that being represented (Degli-Esposti 1996b:79). This notion of excess as created by a complexity of signs, references, and inferences will be applied to a visual analysis of South African artworks, in order to show that this aesthetic of excess is typical of the Neo-Baroque style and is an appropriate method of addressing body politics. Omar Calabrese (1992:58) argues that excess is a destabilising device as it moves pasta systems boundaries, leading to its destruction or the construction of a new system. Calabrese (1992:58) further notes that each system separates itself and defines excess by prohibiting it, placing those aspects seen as excessive as outside and intolerable to the system. Contemporary culture is demonstrating an increase of excess originating from within social systems, which are obtained from art and media products, as well as political and social activities (Calabrese 1992:59). Calabrese (1992:49) hence concludes that Neo-Baroque artists employ excess specifically as a means of overpowering boundaries of a system of social or cultural standards, exposing tension and restriction.

Calabrese's (1992) comments on excess are specifically applied to cultural systems, in particular, how the transgression of the boundaries of a cultural system is a result of the Neo-Baroque style of excess. He (1992:65-66) goes on to describe the Neo-Baroque's use of excess as intending to function upon limits as a means to stimulate and revolutionise a system. Calabrese's ideas on excess could be argued to be a suitable approach to renegotiate a cultural system's beliefs. The intention here is to investigate whether a Neo-Baroque aesthetic of excess could be exploited within the South African context to reconstruct boundaries placed on the body by social systems and to reassess social values.

In this way, characteristics of the Baroque may be considered as a radical form capable of opposing dominant social systems, allowing Neo-Baroque to become an important political mode in the process (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]). Ndalianis (2004:[sp]) states that the fascination with

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[8]The uncanny is termoriginating from Freudian writings on the unheimlich, meaning ' uncanny strangeness'. Kristeva(11982:82) writes that the uncanny is something that is both unsettling or horrifying but yet familiar at the same time, most often relating to taboos society would rather keep hidden

illusion and the investigation of reality used to challenge the legitimacy of dominant ideologies and issues relating to identity and body politics. South Africa, in its current post-colonial context, is still surrounded by many issues relating to body politics and identity within a multicultural country (Post-colonialism [sa]). Post-colonial discourse around the arts discloses that artists have been focusing on matters of identity. As noted by Gen Doy (2000:205), any type of categorising used for the formation of the Other is addressed by artists as a way to overcome marginalisation and establish a dissimilar culture without suppression.

However, South African post-colonial culture seems to have reached an impasse with many unresolved issues, as some people are still seen as Other. Identity and body politics have been thoroughly investigated, although the applications of these ideas, including notions such as the gaze, the abject[9] and the erotic, are relatively unexplored within a South African Neo-Baroque. The intention behind this research is to show that artists are taking these post-colonial concerns and applying them to a dramatic and emotive Neo-Baroque aesthetic, to make the public aware of these issues.

The notion of hybridity in art or society is not new. However, hybridity as related to excess, where the hybrid is established from a multitude of signs, references and media created through complexity and revealing a Neo-Baroque aesthetic, has been little explored. This research proposes that hybridity is a typical component of Neo-Baroque, and this investigation around why such an approach is used could add to a better understanding of current trends within South African art.

In South Africa, the mixture of cultures and identities remains in a continuous state of change, resulting in a hybrid society. This hybridity allows people to reconstruct their identity as a form of resistance to current social values (Doy 2000:134). Such hybrid forms moreover combine ambiguous and compound references, media and technologies, which push the limitations of the work beyond the norm and break boundaries aimed at creating displays to astonish the viewers as they begin to interpret and interact with these complex art forms. Contemporary South African artists are increasingly turning to a Neo-Baroque style to resolve these controversial identity issues, by renegotiating cultural and social constructs. The artists discussed in this paper use their art to examine the particular body politics that affect them as individuals thus

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[9]The abject is a term originally used by Kristeva (1982:4 &70) to describe the human reaction to the threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of distinction between subject and object or self and Other .The abject has to do with that which disturbs identity and social systems. The abject is produced within society as perverse, Other and taboo.

commenting on the qualities which have labelled them as different, Other, and undesirable by dominant social ideals.

1.3 Theoretical framework

This research will take place predominantly through an analysis of specific contemporary South African art using which is characterised by discussions on their themes and content. In addition, the similarities between the stylistic characteristics associated with the Baroque and Neo-Baroque will be examined along with their differences, and include stylistic analysis of the seventeenth century Baroque art. The art of post-colonialism will be considered to substantiate the research. Post-colonial discourse analysis will form a part of the theoretical framework to fully understand current South African concerns relating to the body, due to the colonialism that has influenced the country's political past and current conditions within society. This analysis moreover aims to investigate the Neo-Baroque expression of post-colonial discourse concerns of the Other, and notions such as the gaze and the abject used to substantiate these ideals.

The analysis will show how Neo-Baroque is an art style, incorporating both traditional and new media forms. This will require reference to contemporary texts on new media and advances in the production of art making.

1.4 Literature review and Visual analysis

This research topic will be investigated through the analysis of visual texts (artworks) of contemporary South African artists. Such analyses will include post-colonial concerns about the body as well as referencing those artists who have applied such concerns to Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess. These visual texts will be scrutinized largely through the analysis of their subject matter, formal and stylistic qualities.

One of the primary written texts of the current research is Omar Calabrese's *Neo-Baroque: A sign of the times* (1992). Calabrese argues that Neo-Baroque art can be seen as a social aesthetic which expresses contemporary society's ideals, and he uses excess as a means of going beyond social boundaries and limitations and as a destabilising mechanism to throw doubt on existing social and political orders. Calabrese's writings on the Neo-Baroque are used in relation both to cultural systems and to circumstances such as social, historical, and political conditions, which may influence the South African artists. These ideas will therefore be applied to a South African context.

In her book *Neo-Baroque aesthetics and contemporary entertainment* (2004), Ndalianis examines her findings on Neo-Baroque aesthetics and characteristics, and their similarities and differences to those of the seventeenth century Baroque, as well as the use of perception and illusion to actively engage the spectator in the work by incorporating new technologies and media. Ndalianis is a significant influence in this research. These ideas related to the Neo-Baroque will therefore be applied here to visual art produced in South Africa and, more importantly, when applied to the discussion of the new media art works.

Baroque literature will be reviewed as a point of comparison between the Baroque and Neo-baroque styles. This will incorporate looking at the subject matter, formal characteristics, style, media, as well as the social, political, and technological circumstances from which these two artistic practices arose. In this section, I will mainly consult texts by John Rupert Martin (1977), German Bazin (1968), A. C. Sewter (1972), Robert Wallace (1970) and Arnold Hauser (1952) for both theoretical and historical background to the Baroque style. More recent papers on the Baroque by writers such as Christine Buci-Glucksmann (1994), Gilles Deleuze (1993) and Stephen Calloway (1994) will also be taken into consideration and form part of the argument.

The current research will consider articles such as art critic Salgado's *Hybridity in new world Baroque* (1999) where he interprets hybridity in contemporary Baroque as a means of embracing difference and expressing a more wide-ranging socially mixed setting of our everyday culture. However, his views on his observations of the Neo-Baroque in Latin America will be applied in this paper to South African art and culture.

In her article *Sally Potter's 'Orlando' and the Neo-Baroque scopic regime* (1996b) Degli-Esposti considers the Neo-Baroque visual systems as a means of erasing gender differences by provoking a sense of the uncanny within the viewer. Additionally Degli-Esposti examines how Baroque artistic characteristics are used by Neo-Baroque artists as a means of revealing current social concerns by creating a dialogue or interaction with the viewer. Her writings on Sally Potter's film will be recontextualised and applied to South African art to explore ways where differences within South African society may begin to be erased.

Lastly, an article by Peter Wollen, *Baroque and Neo-Baroque in the age of spectacle* (1993), examines Neo-Baroque trends as a result of contemporary culture's fascination with spectacle which has shown a dramatic increase due to technological advancements. His discussion on the Baroque and Neo-baroque draws comparisons between the two. Wollen's views will be taken into consideration and likewise applied to contemporary South African art.

The following key texts will serve as a reference to post-colonial discourses: Doy's *Black visual culture: Modernity and postmodernity* (2000), Bill Ashcroft's *Post-colonial transformation* (2001), Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor's *Reading the contemporary* (1999), bell hook's[10] premise of the oppositional gaze in *The feminism and visual culture reader* (2003), Sabine Niedhardt's *Returning the gaze* (2006) and Amelia Jones' writings relating to the body as argued in *Performing the body, performing the text* (1999). What remains prominent here is the search for equality as addressed through matters of difference and categorization; and the creation of the Other due to their race, gender or sexual orientation within contemporary culture. The black body, the homosexual body, the lesbian body and even the female body have been socially and culturally constructed as threatening and abject (Doy 2000:157). It is the continuous state of change due to political, economic and social circumstances that makes South African culture a varied hybrid society able to reconstruct identities and social ideologies (Doy 2000:134). South African post-colonial artists attempt to reconstruct bodily ideals which shape the individual.

Post-colonial research will be combined with arguments written on body politics by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (1956), Julia Kristeva in *Powers of horror, an essay on abjection* (1982), Laura Mulvey in *Visual and other pleasures* (1989), Lucy Irigaray in *The sex which is not one* (1985) and Barbara Creed in *The monstrous-feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis* (2001). Particularly significant theories are Butler's on sexuality and gender constructs as a performative enactment prescribed by society, where the body is the foundation on which these compulsory ideologies operate; Kristeva's on the monstrous and abject body; Mulvey's on the objectified body or Other through the gaze; and Creed's on the uncanny and the monstrous female body. These serve as guidelines for arguments concerned with body politics. Although these ideas have been written about extensively, little research exists on the application of these ideas to Neo-Baroque art in South Africa.

This research will review and take into consideration articles relating to body politics by art critics such as Niedhardt (2006), Jones (2003), Gill Perry (2004), Mary Russo (1997), and Alyce Mahon (2007). Their views on body politics will be taken into consideration, including ideas on eroticism, fetishism, and abjection, and will be placed within a South African Neo-Baroque context, revealing how contemporary artists are using notions relating to the body to create abject and monstrous forms. This is a strategy used by Neo-Baroque artists to express their social concerns.

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[10] Gloria Jean Watkins known non de plume is 'bell hooks'. She intentionally un-capitalises her pen name.

1.5 Overview of Chapters

In *Chapter Two: Neo-Baroque artistic practices*, the intention is to show the emergence of Neo-Baroque artistic characteristics in South Africa by visually and theoretically comparing the similarities and differences between seventeenth century Baroque artwork and contemporary South African art work. Contemporary South African art practices will be investigated, specifically artists who explore themes relating to the body and who are incorporating the aesthetics of excess in their work. The possible motivations behind the approach to engage and to remind the viewer of issues relating to body politics will be considered. In this chapter, works by Cohen, Vári, Hlobo and Rose will be visually evaluated and discussed.

This chapter will firstly look at seventeenth century Baroque art, highlighting the key stylistic characteristics associated with the style, as discussed by art critics Hauser (1952), Martin (1977), Bazin (1968), and Sewter (1972). Next, the Neo-Baroque art style will be discussed to determine important aspects of the movement and in order to reveal any differences and similarities between the two styles. This will be done by looking at contemporary writers Calabrese (1992), Ndalianis (2005), Gilles Deleuze (1994), Wollen (1993), and Degli-Esposti's (1996) writings on the Neo-Baroque. Lastly, contemporary South African art works will be discussed, looking for key Baroque stylistic characteristics in order to establish the emergence of Neo-Baroque artistic trends in contemporary South African art.

In *Chapter Three: The Neo-Baroque as a sign of crisis*, the aim is to discover how artists use Baroque elements and stylistic characteristics along with dominant discourses of post-colonialism and postmodernism to establish a form of cultural resistance. In addition, it will be determined in which way this manifests through complexity by incorporating abject and erotic associations used to transgress social values. The intention is to investigate whether South African artists are displaying Neo-Baroque tendencies to express a sense of crisis similar to the Baroque styles that have manifested over the centuries whenever a period of predicament has affected artistic creation.

Post-colonial and Neo-Baroque approaches to body politics will be considered within a South African context through visual examples of artworks by artists such as Cohen, Rose, Hlobo, Mntambo, and Farber. Various views on the body will be placed within a Neo-Baroque context to show how these contemporary artists are using concepts relating to the body to create abject and monstrous forms, creating a strategy to express social concerns. Types of cultural resistance within South African artworks will be explored through the use of the abject, the erotic, and

spectacle, which will then be related to the effect on the viewer's gaze and his or her engagement with and reaction to the artwork.

This chapter will begin by looking at post-colonial discourse by writers such as Ashcroft (2001), San Juan (1998), Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995), Homi K Bhabha (1995), Doy (2001) and Edward Said (1995). These writings will be explored in relation to body politics by writers such as Jones (2003), Butler (1956), Irigaray (1985), Sigmund Freud (1930; 1953), Russo (1997), Perry (2004) and Niall Richardson (2010). This will including theories on the gaze written by Mulvey (1989) and bell hooks (2003); the abject as discussed by Kristeva (1982); Eroticism as discussed by Mahon (2007) and Georges Bataille (1986); as well as fetishism as discussed by Anthony Shelton (1995) and Valerie Steele (1996). These writers' theories will be applied to the Neo-Baroque by contemporary writers Calabrese (1992), Ndalianis (2005), Degli-Esposti's (1996), Steven Calloway (1994), and Salgado (1999).

In *Chapter Four: Neo-Baroque hybrid forms in light of social concerns*, the intention is to determine if Neo-Baroque hybrid forms allow for the communication of a more inclusive society revealing a mixed cultural representation. By combining new digital media and technologies, accompanied by more traditional forms of art making, complex and unique hybrid art forms result. Through visual examples of artworks by Vári, Mntambo and Cohen, the use of hybrid art forms will be explored to assess the manner in which various media are combined, as well as to determine how new digital technology affects contemporary art and how the viewer might engage with the art work. It is through the multiplicity of media, references, content and strategies that excess in the works is inevitably brought about.

It will be argued that the hybrid is used by contemporary artists to deliver commentary. This is achieved by contrasting reality and illusion in order to make people question their own realities. It will, moreover, be argued that new media art forms allow artists to break social and cultural boundaries as a form of resistance so as to contest issues relating to body politics. These hybrid forms combine contradictory and multiple references, media and technologies, pushing the limitations of the artwork beyond the norm and so rupturing boundaries. These works are often aimed at creating spectacle and viewer engagement mainly through the combination of objects, connotations, or references, as the viewer begins to interpret and interact with these complex art forms.

This chapter will mainly refer to Salgado's article *Hybridity in new world Baroque theory* (1999), which discusses the use of hybrid signs and symbols within a post-colonial culture as a form of resistance, as well as Ndalianis's theory on Neo-Baroque and digital technology in *Neo-*

Baroque aesthetics and contemporary entertainment (2005). This will be applied to articles theorising developments of new media in the arts by Timothy Murray in his book *Digital Baroque, new media art, and cinematic folds* (2008); Michael Rush's book *New Media in art* (2005) and Andrew Darley's book entitled *Visual digital culture, surface play and spectacle in new media genres* (2000). Theories on the hybrid and abject as exemplified by the work of theorist Bhabha and contemporary critics Creed, Kristeva and Russo will also be employed in order to bolster argumentation around the hybridity factor within a neo-Baroque context.

CHAPTER 2: NEO-BAROQUE ARTISTIC PRACTICES

The Neo-Baroque aesthetic of excess is now evident more frequently in contemporary South African art. This chapter investigates South African art practices in which artists who work with themes relating to the body incorporate Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess to unsettle the viewer, as well as the intention behind such an approach. The emergence of Neo-Baroque stylistic characteristics will be established through a comparison between the seventeenth century Baroque and contemporary Neo-Baroque art styles. Highlighting their similarities and differences may also help facilitate a better understanding of the current cultural and social concerns in South Africa which have led to the emergence of Neo-Baroque artistic trends. My intention is to show that many artists employ Baroque elements as a means of reawakening public interest about unresolved issues relating to body politics such as race, gender and sexuality. Within this context, excess in art is used as a site for contesting social norms, to create tensions and to break down social barriers. This chapter will also establish the artists' purposes behind their conscious use of the Baroque aesthetic of excess which characterises resistance and whether such shock tactics achieve the desired outcome.

2.1 The Baroque art of the seventeenth century

The term Baroque is associated with the seventeenth century and is used to describe the art and culture of this particular era in time. The Baroque expression assumed a multiplicity of forms in various European countries, as a response to their political, economic, and religious views (Martin 1977:12& Hauser 1962:158). Despite such diversity, unity may be found in the embodiment of certain common ideas, approaches, and beliefs (Martin 1977:12). According to Wallace (1970:11) the word 'Baroque' was originally intended as a derogatory word when it first came into use in Europe, describing something that was *bizarre, excessively ornate, distorted* and even *insincere*. However, the term 'Baroque' today describes a particular artistic approach, implying the use by artists of *excessiveness, extravagance, impulsiveness*, and *virtuosity*, to stir a strong reaction in the viewer (Ndalianis 2004).

The seventeenth century was a time of immense progress in the fields of philosophy, science and economics, with political changes in the state (Martin 1977:12). This contributed to the transformation of European society, and also impacted on the arts as it brought about the end of aristocratic patronage of art, which up until then had controlled the production of art (Sewter 1972:217). Martin (1977:12) states that this period is also known for its incessant theological debates, resulting in a new sense of balance to religious power as is evident in the religious themes used by Baroque artists. Artists, musicians, writers, and the general population began to

express a need for a more intense personal religious experience. This led directly to the artists' aim to arouse the senses of the viewer, in order to create an *emotional* experience for both themselves and their audiences through their artwork.

Baroque art aimed for visual effect, whether through well planned tactics of perspective or excessive, extravagant elements, designed to cause powerful emotional expression; or by staged use of light and dark in their fantastic and rather imaginative compositions (Wollen 1993:173). For Baroque artists, light became an important factor, used as a tool for expression, and having underlying symbolic meanings of life, death, religion, and the sublime (Martin 1977:15-16). Adams (2002:652) explains that the Baroque artists liked to dramatically contrast colour and light with richly textured surfaces. Adams (2002:652) also notes that the Baroque space is usually asymmetrical and appears to have no controlled linear perspective, most often including sharp diagonal lines. For Hauser (1962:168) the impulsive diagonals, abrupt foreshortenings and exaggerated contrasts in lighting all reveal an irresistible longing for infinity incited by new philosophies based on natural science (1953:166). Hauser (1962:168) takes this further by stating that every line directs the eye into the distance and that every detail is in a state of tension. Deleuze (1993:35) observes that the texture of the material, such as stone and marble, was enhanced and taken to the limit to intrigue the viewer's senses by drawing attention to the tactile qualities of the work through mark making, chiaroscuro, and lighting effects. This is especially evident in the folds of fabric which the Baroque artists loved to incorporate whether as decoration, clothing, or drapery used to create an infinite line of expression (Deleuze 1993:34). This interest in materiality can be seen in Baroque works by artists such as Arternisia Gentileschi (1593-1652), Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598-1680), and Pietro da Cortona (1596-1669).

2.1.1 *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa by Gianlorenzo Bernini*

Bernini's sculpture *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (Figure 1) is based on Saint Teresa's own writings about this experience, and he tried to portray the occurrence in a tangible manner (Hibbard 1965:137). As was typical of Baroque artists, Bernini intended to create a representation that appeared not only visually realistic, but also had a tactile reality (Hibbard 1965:138& Hauser 1962:160). Encircled by elaborate architecture the marble sculptural installation seems to drift on plumped-up clouds, while rays of golden light, formed by metallic rods, beam down, highlighting the artifice of the staged composition. The artwork has been situated strategically in the chapel so that it is flooded with natural light. This causes dramatic contrasts while highlighting certain areas of the drapery and the bodies of the subjects (Hibbard 1965:137). Bernini has created the illusion that Saint Teresa is in motion yet tension, as if her

figure is falling back while simultaneously being raised up, as if an external force has taken hold of her (Hibbard 1965:137). Hibbard (1965:137) believes that this depiction of the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* is typical of Baroque art works, in that Bernini reveals his view of a spectacular event, managing to create both tension and movement within the work in order to rouse a reaction in the viewer. Hibbard (1965:138) describes the Teresa figure as having heavy eyelids as though struggling to stay conscious, while her slightly-parted lips seem to moan, giving the impression that the angel has stabbed her with his arrow. This idea is reinforced by the way her left hand and feet dangle as if lifeless beside her. Teresa's hands, head and feet are clearly visible, but her body is shrouded by an excessive amount of flowing drapery (Hibbard 1965:140). Deleuze (1993:34-36) claims that Baroque artists use the folds in drapery as a form of expression by creating lines that display tension, drama or emotion, as evident in this sculpture, as well as three dimensional space as the lines here seem to move beyond the frame of the work. The curves created by the fabric establishes contrasts of tautness and relaxation within the work, and further emphasises the tactility of the work.

Ndalianis (2005:216) maintains that the figure of the angel contrasts strongly with Saint Teresa: the angel is upright while the saint lies in a diagonal position; the angel smiles while Saint Teresa moans; the angel calmly holds Saint Teresa's gown to stab her again with his arrow, while she falls back (Ndalianis 2005:216). The angel descends from the metallic rods which represent rays of unnatural light extending out from the painted skies above (Figure 2). The drapery lightly covering the angel's body is different in texture from the coarse cloth of Saint Teresa's cloak. Hibbard (1965:140) notes that, although positioned on a cloud in the sculpture, Saint Teresa seems earthbound, as if dragged down by the weight of her gown. This is emphasised by the angle of her body and the tilt of her head. Teresa's clothing becomes excessive with its numerous folds which extend, invert and cover her. It is worth considering whether the heaviness and excessiveness of the folds could be a metaphorical representation of Saint Teresa's experience, being used to convey the weight of this emotional experience, the lines created by the folds in the fabric becoming a form of expression used to increase the drama of the event.

Figure 1: Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, 1645-1652.
Marble, 3.51m.
Carnaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome.
(Adams 2002:669).

According to Hibbard (1965:138), Bernini's creation of a tangible illusion of the event conveys meaning on more than one level. He continues that the viewer, on observing the spectacle of Saint Teresa's ecstasy upon entering the chapel, becomes a participant in this religious experience. Hibbard (1965:39) also notes that the spectacle with which the viewer is confronted is one of a physical climax. Viewers observe Bernini's depiction of the dramatic portrayal of Saint Teresa's experience as if it is happening in front of them, since various devices are used to make the experience appear more real.

Bernini intended to show Saint Teresa's emotional state of mind, achieved through the use of excess in the dramatic composition, abundance of detail, lighting, and contrasting diagonals. This excessiveness creates an emotional connection between the sculpture and the viewer. I concur with Ndalianis' (2005:216) opinion that the staged scene is used to entice the viewer's senses. The work's ability to stir the viewer emotionally shows important characteristics of Baroque art. Bernini's use of lighting tactically enhances the drama of the event. The contrasts in textures and between the two figures, as well as the intricate details, contribute to the work's excessiveness, as the viewer is intended to be overcome by the spectacle. The effect of shock and awe is increased as the viewer begins to interpret the work and make other associations: such as questioning why the angel smiles as he penetrates Saint Teresa with his arrow, is Saint Teresa dying or having an orgasmic experience, and why would a heavenly creature harm a

saint? All of this leaves the viewer with more than few implications to ponder on in order to make sense of the art work.

Figure 2: Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, 1645-1652.
Marble, 3.51m.
Carnaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome.
(Adams 2002:668).

In *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa,* Bernini merged a variety of media including painting, sculpture, and architecture into a unified composition that perceptually appears to extend into the surrounding church (Figure 2). This would have been a new and revolutionary approach to art at this time. Ndalianis (2005:216) points out that the diverse media maintain their differences, allowing each to surpass its own limits as one merges into another. She (2005:216) goes on to say that the movement between the different media is used to create a direct reaction within the viewer. The marble, architectural detail, gold, painting, and stucco fuse into one another, inviting the viewer into the space in which Bernini's illustration of the event takes place, allowing one to embrace the polycentric nature of the composition. This can be seen where the painted skies with rays of light merge with the metal rods which descend into the space of the chapel. The polycentric nature of the work is distinctive of the Baroque era, where the focus of the work changes constantly, being dependant on the position of the viewer. This elaborate work, with its various references and the lavish context in which the sculpture is placed, becomes excessive, and the viewer is intended to feel overwhelmed.

A number of theorists have commented on yet another important aspect of Baroque art: the point of perspective. According to Martin (1977:157), Baroque stimulation of the spectator's sense is attained by actively engaging the spectator in the 'psychological-space' produced by the art work, by combining the actual space occupied by the viewer and the fictive space of the artwork, and the integration of the viewer into the artwork's space is a powerful Baroque feature (Martin 1977:14). Bazin (1968:40) argues that the Baroque viewer becomes an essential element who is in dialogue with the artist. The centre – or focal point – is reliant upon the location of the viewer in relation to the artwork, which will continuously adjust depending on the spectator's view point.

Ndalianis (2004:[sp]) takes this argument further, stating that the viewer is the only factor that remains stable. The work changes into a dynamic process that varies as a result of the viewer interacting with the work, producing various perspectives, dynamic motion and the perceptual collapse of any restrictions usually created by the frame (Ndalianis [sa]). For Deleuze (1993:123) the Baroque artwork moves into the surrounding space and in some cases becomes an installation piece as it merges with the architectural space. This can be seen particularly in the sculptural works and the ceiling frescoes by artists such as Bernini, Giovanni Battista Gaulli (1639-1709) and Annibale Carracci (1560-1609), where the viewers walk around the sculptural form taking in its excessive details from various angles, shifting their perspective as they move around the artwork.

From these opinions, it may be concluded that the viewing of Baroque art becomes a visual, sensual, and emotional occurrence in which the viewer participates. For Hauser (1962:162) such participation on the part of the viewer even becomes cinematic as he believes that the Baroque style has a tendency to make the art work seem like a real event which extends beyond the frame, like a performance piece in which the viewer momentarily participates. In the Baroque era, the narrative - in this case a religious event - was portrayed in such a life-like and realistic manner that for a viewer of this period it must have appeared real. It is hence the realistic nature of the work that enhances the viewer's experience and stirs an emotional response.

The work was intended to complement the environment in which it was placed, and in turn, the surrounding space would enhance the work. The composition has been staged around Saint Teresa, in which position and actions of her body are used to establish movement or dynamism within the work. The placement of the two accompanying figures and the movement in their bodies create diagonal lines which lead the viewer's eye beyond the sculpture and into the

surrounding space. This all adds to the constructed nature of the composition, typical of Baroque spectacle.

2.1.2 *Judith Slaying Holofernes by Artemisia Gentileschi's*

According to Degli-Esposti (1996b:76) Baroque art forms made use of self conscious tricks and observational devices, resulting in the works becoming explicitly created aesthetic forms which used art applications such as perspective, shading, composition and directional lines to achieve their desired effect, as is evident in *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. The Baroque artists deliberately took this approach of blatantly over-constructing their works: once the viewer observed the work and interpreted its content, it accentuated excess and became overpowering. Bazin (1968:43) clarifies this by stating that the viewer is confronted with countless signs, numerous connotations, and implications, leaving the viewer with an vast range of ideas to interpret. In the midst of the excessiveness and complexity of the work, beauty is moreover highlighted. Degli-Esposti (1996b:76) explains that the Baroque artists achieved this feeling of being inundated by excessive complexity and splendour through various means such as metamorphoses, intertextuality, repetition, detail, chaos, parody, staging and carnivalisation to name just a few tactics.

The painting *Judith slaying Holofernes* (Figure 3) demonstrates many of the Baroque characteristics discussed so far. The use of extreme light and dark highlights the drama and violence of the event being depicted, in which Holofernes fights for his life, held down while Judith holds a dagger to his throat. The typical Baroque element of dynamism is created here by the various angles, abrupt foreshortenings, and the appearance of movement as generated by a range of sharp diagonals caused by the actions of the three figures. The composition is visibly constructed with emphasis placed on numerous fine details such as the different types of fabrics used for the bedding and clothing, as well as the facial expressions and movements of the three subjects. The composition is based on a single action used to unify the composition and establish motion through the figures' actions. The richly textured surfaces, contrasting colour and lighting, as well as the emphasis on detail are all used to draw attention to excess and are used for visual effect. In addition, the folds in the fabric lead the eye beyond the frame of the canvas.

Figure 3: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith slaying Holofernes*, 1614-1620.
Oil on canvas, 1.99 x1.63 m.
Galleridegli Uffizi, Florence.
(Adams 2002:679).

According to Adams (2002:678) the painting refers to an event from the Book of Judith in the Old Testament. Judith, a Hebrew widow with her servant Abra, go to Holofernes's camp intending to make him drunk, and then use his own sword to cut off of his head (Adams 2002:678). The artist's choice to depict a Biblical event surrounded by theological controversy is considered to be typical of the Baroque era (Martin 1977:12). This violent scene, related to life and death, is also characteristic of the Baroque, intended to create an emotional response in the viewer. The viewing experience of this fictive image is intensified by the illusion that the scene is actually happening in front of the viewer.

Umberto Eco (2007:169) describes the Baroque era as having a rising interest for the phenomenal and for everything that enticed speculation. Eco (2007:169) explains that in this cultural climate, artists investigated subjects of violence, death, and terror as seen in both *Judith Slaying Holofernes* and *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. According to Adams (2002:652), since the Baroque revealed a new desire for violent narratives and dramatic action, representation of emotion was revealed through a wide range of expressions. Baroque art also achieved a new kind of naturalism which reflected the scientific advances of the period (Adams 2002:652). In general, the Baroque painting and sculptures tended to be more energetic, overtly emotional,

and relatively unrestrained compared to earlier styles. It is the combination of the natural appearance, dynamism, and attention to detail that arouses emotion and enhances the drama of the event, evident in both examples discussed so far.

According to Hauser (1952:162), amidst all this chaotic excess of dramatic appearance, the Baroque composition gives the feeling of being unfinished and disjointed as one side is usually over-emphasised, creating the impression that the work goes beyond the frame. This is achieved most commonly by the use of overlapping pictorial elements, the excessive differences in the size of objects seen in perspective, as well as the artists' conscious disregard of directional lines and containment by the frame (format) of the work. Every line seems to lead the eye into the distance and every form appears to be in a state of tension or motion, often giving a confused and bizarre quality to the work (Hauser 1952:168).

In general, Baroque compositions were more complex and richer, yet similar in nature to one another (Hauser 1952:164). Bazin (1968:103) agrees that Baroque artists organised the figures in their work according to one unifying principle: a single action that draws the rhythm within the work from the power and movement of the human body. For Bazin (1968:103-104) this is particularly evident in Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio's (1571-1610) paintings such as *The crucifixion of Saint Peter* (1600), or *The conversion of Saint Paul* (1601) (Figure 4). The figures in Baroque art appear to be caught in the midst of a drama, often of life and death, accentuated by the formal contrast of angles, diagonal and spiral movements, as well as spatial dissimilarities (Bazin 1968:104). This is particularly evident in Bernini's sculptural works as can be seen in *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*.

2.1.3 *The Conversion of Saint Paul by Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio*

The painting *Conversion of Saint Paul* (figure 4) was commissioned by Pope Clement VIII (Adams 2002:677). According to Adams (2002:677), the painting illustrates a Biblical scene in Act 9:3-9, where Saul, a Roman Jew who persecuted the Christians, fell off of his horse while en route to Damascus. A bright light lit up the sky, blinding Saul, and the voice of Christ asked why he was persecuting the Christians and directed him to continue to Damascus (Adams 2002:677). Once there, an apostle returned his vision and Saul converted to Christianity, becoming the apostle Paul (Adams 2002:677).

This religious theme, portrayed as a dramatic event, is typical of the Baroque. The chaos and drama is heightened by the positioning of Saul's figure lying on the ground with his arms outstretched towards the light, with his horse standing over him. The composition is constructed in an explicit manner; note the positioning of Saul's figure, the light radiating down from the

top right corner, as well as the stances of the horse and servant. More evidence of the carefully fabricated construction can be found in foreshortening, the overt use of multiple diagonals, and the abundance of detail, highlighted by strong contrasts in light and colour, emphasising the melodramatic nature of the event portrayed. This is used to stir an emotional reaction within the viewer and accentuate excess.

The rays of light, Saul's figure, the folds in his cloak and dark background all lead the viewer's eye beyond the frame of the work. This work is typical of Baroque composition, where the figures in the work have been arranged according to a single action, in this case Saul's figure outstretched on the ground. The rhythm in the work is created from the actions of Saul's body which begin in the foreground and continue into the background. Adams (2002:667) maintains that Saul's figure, with his arms stretched out, could also be seen to represent the crucifixion. The positioning of the bodies makes use of foreshortening and diagonals to heighten the drama of the event and establish movement, again typical of a Baroque composition; as well as the attention to detail such as the muscle definition of Saul and his horse, his clothing, the folds in the fabric, the rays of light, and the positioning and facial expression of the servant.
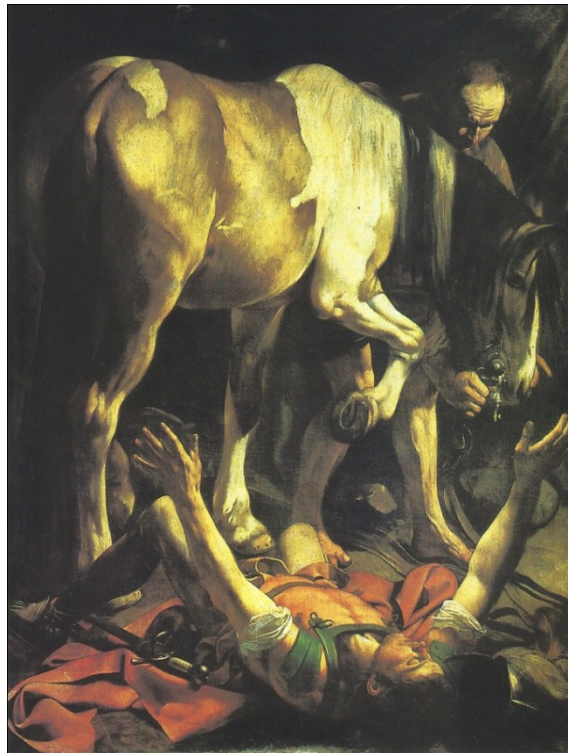

Figure 4: Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio, *Conversion of Saint Paul*, 1601.
Oil on Canvas, 2.3 x 1.75 m.
Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome.
(Adams 2002:677).

As in the works of Bernini and Gentileschi, the image seems to be a physical, actually occurring event, even though fictive. Ndalianis (2005:12) argues that the Baroque artists were fascinated with the simulation of reality and the probing of reality, due to social concerns. This became a stylistic approach used to contest the reality of dominant ideologies, while at the same time often revealing the artist's own stance. Ndalianis (2004:[sp]) goes on to say that the Baroque was a product of the dramatic social and historical conditions and changes of its time, which resulted in similar dramatically changing aesthetic forms.

Social crisis and change created the context from which the Baroque resistance formed (Ndalianis2004:[sp]). For example, the seventeenth century is known politically as a period of Absolutism, as governors executed complete control over their countries (Adams 2002:650), as in France and England. A reaction to Absolutism emerged during the seventeenth century. During this time the trade route of Europe was being redrawn, with the Dutch becoming the principal trading nation of the West (Adams 2002:650).

Throughout this time in history, religious tensions were apparent, which became more extreme as new discoveries by scientists such as Isaac Newton (1642-1727), Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)and Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) clashed with Catholic beliefs about the world as they knew it (Adams 2002:651). All these factors established the context from which the Baroque emerged: a time of great change, controversy and uncertainty.

It will be shown in the rest of this chapter that the Neo-Baroque style carries many of the same characteristics of the Baroque. This will become evident in the emphasis towards detail, staged compositions, excess and emotional expression used to engage the viewer. The fascination with spectacle and illusion can also be found, particularly in works which embrace new media and performance. This discussion on the Neo-baroque is placed specifically within the context of South African art.

2.2 Neo-Baroque

Traces of new forms of the Baroque, the 'Neo-Baroque', can be found on an international level from the twentieth century in various art forms like architecture, literature, music, films, photography, and art (Calloway 1994:12). Calabrese (1992:15) believes that the 'Neo' in Neo-Baroque refers to the repeat or the re-use of a particular historical period or style, in this case the Baroque. According to Ndalianis (2005:16), Neo-Baroque and postmodernism are allied as they both share many of the same viewpoints. Degli-Esposti (1996b:78) takes this argument further

by saying that the Neo-Baroque can be found in the postmodern form of expression, where artists' representations reveal a sense of self exploration, self-reference and imitation - as was apparent in Baroque mirroring effects.

However, Neo-Baroque can also be seen as a reaction to postmodern Minimalism and the Conceptual aesthetic which has dominated contemporary art over the last twenty years, as artists have turned instead to excess and spectacle as means of expression (Neo/Baroque 2005). After reviewing these arguments, aspects of both approaches may be seen as relevant, leading to the conclusion that Neo-Baroque contains an element of contradiction or ambiguity: while the Neo-Baroque as a style may be seen as a reaction to postmodern minimalism, it does incorporate many elements and ideals typically described as postmodern (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]).

In accordance with Ndalianis (2004:[sp]) many similarities can be seen between the seventeenth century Baroque and the contemporary Neo-Baroque art styles, in their application and use of formal characteristics. These include the use of narrative, and emphasis on the spectacular, forms that appropriately address mass culture. They both exploit spectacle and sensory participation, enhancing lighting for dramatic effect in order to arouse emotions in the viewer.

Calloway (1994:13) explains that the Baroque era was an age of experimentation which, he maintains, relates to the present generation's artists' fascination with Baroque characteristics, and their adaptation of new technological developments to contemporary interests and concerns. The distinguishing factor between these two periods is the nature of the historical and social conditions from which they materialised (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]). Buci-Glucksmann (1994:3-4, 23) remarks that the contemporary Neo-Baroque can be seen as a result of globalisation, consumerism and mass media, while the 'original' Baroque arose as the result of the emerging transportation and industrial developments on culture as well as the political developments caused by monarchy-run conditions. Over the last twenty years, South Africa has also gone through many dramatic changes, both politically and economically, which could be the context from which the Neo-Baroque art form has grown within South Africa.

According to Wollen (1993:183), Neo-Baroque predominantly shows a multifaceted conceptual change as a result of technological, digital, industrial, and economic changes. Ndalianis (2005:5) takes this idea further by stating that the Neo-Baroque embraces modern digital technology by combining various features in ways that are similar to the movement of the seventeenth century Baroque art forms, but expressed differently as it is adapted to a contemporary context. Ndalianis (2005:3) explains this by saying that, due to the constant

advances in new technologies which are continuously adjusting to become more realistic, the use of three dimensional and special effects reveals a desire to overwhelm the viewer's senses.

Various media merge with one another, such as video, auditory, performance, and digital, which are often combined with traditional art forms to allow different artistic styles to come together and generate new hybrid structures (Ndalianis 2005:3). Narratives are open and move into the surrounding space which, through the use of special effects,creates illusions that attempt to go beyond the artworks frame and include the viewerin the display (Ndalianis 2005:3). The intention of the spectacle is to blur as well as draw attention to the frame that separates the viewer's reality from the portrayed fantasy (Ndalianis 2005:158).

This argument, although based on film, can still be applied to art works especially video, as evident in the works of Cohen, Vári, Mntambo and Rose, where digital manipulation techniques allow the artists to create images which appear realistic even though obviously fictive. The intention here is to temporarily blur the line between reality and illusion and so draw the attention of the viewer.

Both Calabrese (1992:59) and Ndalianis (2005:73) state that the Neo-Baroque style questions the truth of prevailing beliefs and everyday reality by transgressing the boundaries of the system through excess. For Calabrese (1992:49) excess in a Neo-Baroque context is used to overcome and renegotiate current social, cultural, and political values. Accordingly, all societies or systems of belief claim something to be excessive when they do not want to accept it into their system of beliefs (Calabrese 1992:58). Adding to this Calloway (1994:226) notes that a certain degree of visual intensity and inclination towards excess are common attributes in today's visual culture, as is particularly evident in film. This is achieved most often through the use of spectacle and shock made possible by developments in technology. It will become evident in Hlobo's, Cohen's, Rose's, Mntambo's and Vari's works that they create excess not only through multiple references and inferences, but also through erotic and abject associations as a means to transgress and disturb social beliefs relating to bodily difference.

Jim Collins (1995:12) notes that in contemporary society there is an increase in innovation, and technologies are constantly progressing to the point where everyday life is presented with a build-up of excess. Collins (1995:11) argues that our present situation is one of over-indulgence in sensory experience, or a semiotic excess, and that such forms of excess can be used to either free or demolish identity and social systems (Collins 1995:5). According to Calabrese (1992:58), Baroque excess was created within a system and then continued to go beyond its

boundaries. It becomes understandable then, how, in today's society, artists are also turning towards forms of excess, since society is surrounded by visual excess on a daily basis.

Degli-Esposti (1996b:79) says the Neo-Baroque artists embrace this notion in their work by including many details and references having numerous underlying meanings, arguing that each detail becomes an expression that places emphasis on excess. This will become evident in the analysis of artworks of the abovementioned South African artists as they use multiple references and inferences to the point of excess, often transgressing social boundaries. Calabrese (1992:59) explains that today's society is enduring an increase in excess derived from within society, ranging from artworks and the media to political and social circumstances in our everyday environment.

Content representing morphological, ethical, emotional, and aesthetic categories has become a method used to distress social ideologies (Calabrese 1992:59). For example, the rebirth of the 'monster', which plays on notions of the abject and the Other, violence or horror, as well as the theme of sexuality seem to be appearing more often (Calabrese 1992:59-61), as can be seen in the work of Cohen, Hlobo and Rose. Calabrese (1992:59) maintains that erotic excess is an appropriate way of probing and challenging collective beliefs, as excessive sexuality can be used to move beyond confines of current social values. He (1992:59) goes on to state that excessive sexuality has always been a representation of something else, such as liberation. This issue will become evident when analysing the art works in relation to their influence on society and the Neo-Baroque.

The Neo-Baroque spectacle draws the gaze of the spectator in a number of possible directions, highlighting the fact that, much like the Baroque, the Neo-Baroque prefers dynamic and rising polycentrism (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]). In this way, the works are often filled with multiple signs and inter-textual suggestions which force the viewer to make sense of the work (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]).

Neo-Baroque artworks depend upon the embedded layers of meaning entangled within the excessive surface detail of the work (Korotkin 2004), used to engage the viewer and stir a reaction. Excess is created through the complexity of the work. This approach to art can be seen as a result of our modern lifestyle as artists adapt to keep up with visual culture. It becomes necessary to keep up with and, at times, even outdo the modern technological developments in order for their work to make an impact.

The use of multiple references and layers of meaning, as well as the combination of different media in the art works, has created new a hybrid art form which allows artists to push the

boundaries of art to new levels. The combination of performance or theatre costume in combination with new media forms like video and digital art seems to be a particularly common trend when contesting body politics, as will be discussed in Chapter Four. These hybrid art forms are excessive, often drawing on the abject and erotic, which are used as a formal strategy to shock the viewer and contest body politics. This form of hybridity in art seems well suited to reflect contemporary society and is an appropriate form to reflect the South African context. This understanding corresponds with Ndalianis's (2004:[sp]) view that Neo-Baroque art forms reveal aesthetic and formal alterations which are informed by cultural, social, and economic changes.

Neo-Baroque becomes an appropriate approach for South African artists, as it allows them to incorporate various references which better mirror our multi-cultural environment than was previously the case. The works are loaded with layers of meaning which are inter-textual and often refer to various ethnicities, races, sexualities and cultures in one work as a means of reflecting aspects of our society that artists feel need to be acknowledged, changed or reconstructed. These artists are revealing underlying tensions within society through excess, most of which are issues relating to body politics such as race, gender, and sexuality.

Similar to the Baroque, Neo-Baroque makes use of visual and sensorial excess, and shifts in activity within the space, creating an irregular composition. Walton (2008:[sp]) says that Neo-Baroque also gives the appearance of the work extending into the surrounding space, with just as much emphasis on detail. Rush (2005:78) explains that the new media available to artists assists them in investigating concepts and new forms of expression, enabling artists to extend boundaries. This form of aesthetic allows the work to be uncontrolled and reflects an unstable world view.

According to Darley (2000:81), the interest in spectacle is not only due to the advances in digital technology but is also directly related to current trends within visual culture. Rather than relying purely on visual elements, artists are making use of tactile awareness, which seems to be facilitated by the new media experience in art (Darley 2000:62). This new form of art can create a bigger impact on the viewer as it becomes not only a visual experience but often requires other senses like touch and hearing, as viewers are no longer mere spectators but become immersed in the art work, a Baroque characteristic. In this way, artists are pushing the boundaries of art to new levels to create an experience for their viewers made possible by new media. In combination with the excessive nature of Neo-Baroque art styles and themes, these works can be used to create shock, even outrage, as they contest various concerns.

Developments in technology have allowed artists to investigate and experiment with ideas relating to both reality and illusions so as to create a bigger impact. According to Darley (2000:132) hybrid art forms exhibit features of both an increased intertextuality and realistic illusion, making the spectacle seem even more real and engaging the viewer on a deeper emotional level. Ndalianis (2004:[sp]) takes this further by stating that the Neo-Baroque shows an infatuation with illusionism used to query the truth of everyday reality within the present cultural environment. Such an understanding becomes part of a prescribed approach to contest the truth of dominant ideologies. These striking illusions are used to blur the point between reality and fantasy, often using excess to challenge social and artistic limits. In the new media, this is achieved through special effects and digital technology which create illusions that seem to morph visually into reality, while reality itself often appears to merge with the illusion, often making it difficult to tell what is real (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]). The images are used to expose the reality of contemporary life (Korotkin 2004) as they appear visually realistic, yet they are obviously fictional (Ndalianis [Sa]). This concern with the questioning of reality may reveal a concern among artists around various current social issues.

In South Africa, artists seem to be questioning body politics, many of which are issues supposedly addressed and solved through the adoption of a post-colonial worldview. However, the emergence of such concerns shows that, although dominant society has given the impression of having solved them, in reality these issues still exist. The Neo-Baroque style is one approach towards uncovering the many underlying issues in South Africa, allowing artists to voice their opinions with a view to creating a response within the general public to provoke changes within society's value systems.

2.3 Establishing Baroque and Neo-Baroque characteristics in contemporary South African art

In an increasing number of instances contemporary South African art appears to be displaying Baroque characteristics. Artists are experimenting more with new media and digital technologies, or combining traditional with everyday materials in new and experimental ways. The artists discussed here specifically work with themes relating to body politics, which include gender, sexuality and race. These were controversial topics a decade ago in the post-colonial era, due to South Africa's political past. However, issues such as gender, race and sexuality, continue to re-emerge, as will become evident in the analysed examples of art works.

2.3.1 *Ndimnandi Ndindodwa by Nicholas Hlobo*

A gay Xhosa South African artist Hlobo explores issues around sexuality and homosexuality through his art. Jacobs (2008:[sp]) describes one of Hlobo's works, *Ndimnandi Ndindodwa* (Figure 5),as a 'voluptuous rubber form slumped onto a leather armchair', with an exaggeratedly large phallic projection pushing up through the rubber. The sculpture is stitched finely together with red ribbon and thread and embellished with excessive quantities of orange organza fabric. The tactile qualities of the materials invite the viewer to touch the work (Jacobs 2008). This was a Baroque trait, where material was used in such a manner as to enhance the tactile nature of the work. As already noted, artists today are influenced by the intensity of spectacle within visual culture leading them to no longer rely purely on the visual, but to try to engage their viewer on a deeper level through tactile qualities, as in this work.

The work is aesthetically seductive, especially in the way in which the details of the various materials are incorporated. However, the work may be seen as abject, once the viewer recognises the various sexual connotations due to its erect phallic form. In this regard, the work contains an uncanny element as it draws on both the familiar and the socially transgressive, instigating excess.

Figure 5: Nicholas Hlobo, *Ndimnandi Ndindodwa*, 2008.
Photograph courtesy of Michael Stevenson Gallery.
(Jacobs 2008).

This work reveals how artists working in a Neo-Baroque style integrate and combine various materials and forms in new and experimental ways to transgress social boundaries. Shelton

(1995:91) observes how tactile smooth surfaces which shine make ideal fetish[11] objects, much like the materials used by Hlobo in this work. This is in agreement with Freud's (1953:156) argument that the tactile aesthetics and common sense of touch reminds us of our own bodily qualities and of sensations related to skin. The artist's engagement with these specific materials comments on tactility and may be seen as excessive, not only through the combination of exuberant materials but also through the erotic inferences implied through layers of inscribed meanings.

Dreyer (2005:185) notes that erotic associations in art works intend to suggest notions of unspoken erotic fantasies, as in Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa.* In this way *Ndimnandi Ndindodwa* (Figure 5) attempts to entice the viewer to interact with the work, to take a closer look at the details, and to feel the textures of the different materials. The rubber tubes, stitching, satin and organza are fetishist in nature, encouraging the viewer to engage and interact with the artwork through the tactile aesthetic of physical desirability and longing (Jacobs 2008:[sp]). Freud (1953:156) explains that tactile sensations are a known source of pleasure and excitation used to arouse erotic associations. Deleuze (1993:36) draws attention to the fact that encouraging tactile awareness is a Baroque characteristic created by the material's texture which is enhanced by the folds in the fabric, the surrounding space, and lighting effects.

According to the current interpretation, Hlobo has skilfully incorporated fetishist materials in this work, in order to entice the viewer to indulge in his or her own erotic desires, and allowing the viewer to engage with the work in an intimate manner and question notions surrounding sexual desire, which are socially constructed as taboo and abject. The materials used to create the erect phallic like form have strong erotic, fetishist, tactile associations. Eroticism emerges in the suggestion communicated through the work as a possibility of transgressing boundaries and may be seen to link to notions of the abject (Kristeva 1982:54). This idea of using erotic, fetishist and abject connotations will be explored more thoroughly in the next chapter as a means of establishing excess and transgressing social values. In suggesting the bodily form of an erect phallus, *Ndimnandi Ndindodwa* (Figure 5) takes a subject seen as private in society and displays it publicly, outside of social boundaries, so becoming a form of transgression. These issues find expression in the excessive connotations found in the work, which are used to

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[11]Fetishism as defined by early psychoanalytical theorists was a creation of male erotic imagination caused by castration anxiety or repressed homosexuality (Hunt 1991:164). Freud defined fetishism as a purely male psychopathology which used phallic substitutes to overcome castration anxiety (Hunt 1991:167). Fetishism can be described as an unconscious process whereby obsessive sexual desire is displaced onto a familiar object which the person associates with the original object of desire (Perry 1999:230). The fetish sign is coded into objects like hair, feet, shoes, ribbons, hats, things that are meaningful to that person. The sign itself becomes the source of fantasy.

unsettle the viewer, allowing for a deeper psychological communication between art workand spectator, as was common in Baroque art (Degli-Esposti 1996b:78).

As with Baroque art, the fabric folds in the artwork become a form of expressive matter as they establish and materialise the structure. For Deleuze (1993:34) the folds become indicative of an expressive line that expands to infinity and becomes part of the space surrounding the artwork. These infinite folds seem to move between material and emotional expression, outside and inside (Deleuze 1993:35). Much like other Neo-Baroque art, Hlobo's work expands into the surrounding space creating many visual spaces with no single meaning. As in Baroque art, the feeling of infinity is created as the work encroaches on the viewer's space while still drawing attention to detail. This can be seen in the way the fabric spreads outward in an abundance of folds which extend into one another, merging with the other materials, namely the rubber and organza. The use of the different materials which form part of the surrounding architectural space can be related to Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (Figure 1). Other similarities can be seen in the use of the diagonal lines created by the folds and the open form which extends into the surrounding space. Both Hlobo's and Bernini's sculptural work emphasise the tactility of the drapery to the point of excess. In both these works the folds of the fabric are used to establish gesture within the work, creating dynamism characteristic of the Baroque.

Ndimnandi Ndindodwa is a large flowing three dimensional sculpture which imposes on the viewer's space, forcing an engagement with the work, as well as the recognition of its implied connotations (Jacobs 2008), another Baroque characteristic. According to Ndalianis (2005:160) the viewer experiences the work and its surrounding space by moving around it, resulting in a dynamic and an interactive experience. Articulating a perceptual collapse of the frame, the work becomes part of the surrounding space, placing this work within the Neo-Baroque genre (Ndalianis 2005:192). Its excessive qualities extend and push boundaries, not only in terms of space, but culturally as well as socially.

This is evident in the artist's attempt to bring about a more open conversation around sexual activity and sexuality, challenging the social boundaries of what is deemed appropriate. The art work can be seen as invading the viewer's space, as if forcing viewers to watch an erotic act, subconsciously recognised as private. Sexual arousal of the male sex organ in a public space is usually considered embarrassing and inappropriate. According to Dennis (2009:2), art is sometimes used by artists to seduce the viewer into transgression. An erect penis is a sign of sexual arousal associated with intercourse and masturbation; and since the penis is the only form in this sculpture, masturbation is probably being represented here. Through 'civilising'

processes, society has established these activities as private and shameful, and so the imposition of this artwork on the viewer is intended to make him or her uncomfortable (Shorter 2004:116-117). The excessive sexual connotations associated with the work could be seen not only as a means of unsettling the viewer, but also to create tension to challenge social boundaries.

There are still hostile attitudes towards black homosexuality in African communities, mainly due to a mistaken belief that homosexuality is a disease brought to Africa by Europeans (Doy 2000:160). Homosexuality contradicts the cultural norms and values of black communities as it is seen as a threat to the propagation of the race (Doy 2000:160). In this regard Hlobo tries to break down cultural barriers that continue to oppress and marginalise black gay people. He explores his own homosexuality as a Xhosa man in order to find ways to address the differences and cultural stereotypes that have become the acceptable norm (Perryer 2004:[sp]). Hlobo calls attention to the unease people feel when faced with issues of sexuality and sexual identity, and how society represses these issues to shield itself from the acceptance of these social realities (Perryer 2004:[sp]).

Questioning ideals relating to reality and illusion within its existing cultural environment was an obsessive concern of the Baroque period, which became an acknowledged approach to dispute the legitimacy of dominant social systems and issues of identity, gender, sexuality and reality (Ndalianis 2005:14). Hlobo adopts a postmodern manner of self-reference and applies it to a Neo-Baroque art style. The application of post-colonial and postmodern social concerns is clearly related to the Baroque aesthetic of excess in his work.

The combination of different materials and non-traditional media, in conjunction with multiple references including those from an African (Xhosa) cultural context, engage the viewer's senses through touch and sight, as they move around the three dimensional work. Dynamism, as in the Baroque, is created by the folds in the fabric which radiate outwards from the actions of a single form. Hlobo uses excess and Baroque aesthetics to confront people with issues relating to homosexuality and sexuality, forcing an acknowledgement of their existence and contesting social values about homosexuality. This work contains numerous Neo-Baroque characteristics which have been placed within a South African social context.

2.3.2 *Lucie's fur version 1:1:1 byTracey Rose*

Rose is a contemporary South African artist known for her performance art and videos. Rose investigates issues relating to race, sexuality and the female body, and has created a variety of characters and personas to draw attention to her concerns on body politics within a South

African context (Spring 2008:273). According to Jones (2004:28), Rose's work is a comment on racial concerns, which are positioned in relation to her own identity as a coloured person. Rose also comments on a variety of other issues in her work, including gender and sexuality. This particular work deals with religious and social beliefs relating to human creation and historical events.

Lucie's fur version 1:1:1 (Figure 6) is an investigation of ideas associated with the origins of humankind. Murinik (2004:31) says that the work both references and challenges Christian belief systems, traditional narratives, and scientific opinions on evolution. The title of the work refers to "Lucy" an 'Australopithecus Afarensis' named the "African Eve", whose remains were discovered in Ethiopia in 1974 (Bedford 2004b:318). The question of Lucy's placement in human evolution has motivated Rose to develop an African metaphor that confronts racial values and forms a strong contrast to biblical views on human creation (Bedford 2004b:318). The questioning of social beliefs and religious ideas was a common Baroque feature as a result of discoveries at the time. In this way, the discovery of these remains has lead Rose to question current religious, scientific and social beliefs.

Figure 6: Tracey Rose, *Lucie's fur version 1:1:1*, 2003.
(Murinik 2004:31).

Bedford (2004b:318) draws attention to intertextuality in *Lucie's fur version 1:1:1* as it incorporates references to other artwork in its composition, such as the architecture and frescoes that embellish the convent of San Marco in Florence. These include alter pieces showing

Madonna encircled by saints. Rose develops a derisive yet serious interpretation by making reference to Lucifer. Bedford (2004b:318) notes that in Rose's work she integrates the setting into a *trompe l'oeil* or dark background to illustrate her own thoughts relating to religion and socially prescribed values.

Here Rose merges her own body with wings and covers the image of her body in bright shades of different paint, making her body actually coloured thus highlighting the constructed nature of race. The composition of the work, based around the action of this single figure, is a Baroque characteristic. The static other figure wears a plain blue dress, and has no facial features. The two figures seem to emerge from the dark background, and their movements create diagonal lines that lead the viewer's eye beyond the image frame, all of which can be shown to be reminders of Baroque art - as can be seen in Caravaggio's *Conversion of St. Paul* (figure 4). Rose undermines the patriarchal structures of art history, science, and religion as means to demonstrate how they are unavoidably linked with oppression and marginalisation (Bedford 2004b:318).

These images serve to liberate black bodies from the many years of marginalisation and domination by the west, allowing them to begin to regain a part of visual culture of which they were previously deprived (Ngcobo 2006b). This post-colonial ideal relates to the notion that much of history is viewed and documented from a Western point of view. In this artwork, Rose refers to the history of the African people who were not given the opportunity to voice their own perspective of historical events. Rose is thereby addressing and acknowledging them in her work. The artist herself believes the work not only engages with history, but also presents different ways of interpreting it (Murinik 2004:34). In a conversation with Tracy Murinik (2004:34), Rose says that the intended meaning of 1:1:1 in the title is verse one, of chapter one, in version one and says that this is a different perspective on the origin of human beings. She points out that this work began with her own origins in Kwazulu Natal, referring to the Zulu culture. Rose describes how there are many different ideas about the origins of humankind and that this work investigates the Christian view of evolution. To Rose the work engages with particular aspects of the Christian belief, not just in a visual manner, but also in the title's text, by mixing the Old and New versions of the Bible (Murinik 2004:34).

According to Salgado (1999:323), Neo-Baroque pressure is created from social, ethnic, cross-cultural differences and underlying hostility carried through from colonial times. This makes the questioning of historical ideals as relating to aspects of identity from the past to the present a key Neo-Baroque feature to retrieve aspects of our history and disclose the indescribable nature of truth (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]). Rose not only questions western history but her own history as

well, drawing on multiple references and connotations within the work. She has manipulated different layers of images with the aid of digital technology.

The work also questions gender roles, racial concerns, and aspects of her identity. By portraying Lucifer as a black female instead of a white male, as according to Christian mythology, she places emphasis on the female role in history, which usually is given a more subordinate role. The title *Lucie's fur*, according to Rose refers to Lucie's vagina, saying that 'we all come from our mothers' (Murinik 2004:34) and may be perceived as an attempt to shock. The title is also a play on *Lucifer*. The work brings in many versions to the origin of man, twisting and throwing doubt on the reality of Christian beliefs.

The constructed nature of reality and the revealing of another truth firmly places *Lucie's fur version 1:1:1* within a Neo-Baroque context. As noted Rose deliberately uses the female body to question gender roles within society and history. Butler (1956:371) argues that the body is not the usual site for cultural differentiation or identity, as it is inscribed by history and culture; but the body is nonetheless the basis on which gender and constructs of obligatory sexuality function (Butler 1956:372). The use of Rose's own body in her work allows her to interrogate and deconstruct her own identity, at the same time revealing that gender and sexuality are not natural constructs but are rather created culturally within society as can be seen throughout history. This particular aspect of identity construction will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

The Neo-Baroque contextualisation of *Lucie's fur version 1:1:1* can be seen in the multiplicity of references that are drawn upon, while various media were used in the creation of the artwork. Rose created the work digitally, adopting modern technology and new media art forms. The combination of old and modern references when combined with new media creates an illusionary realistic hybrid image which perceptually engages the viewer through its complexity. The viewer is given a different view on the origins of man, while still referencing previous historical versions and myths. This suggests that the interpretation of the work is left open to the viewers, and may provoke questioning around issues relating to their own historical, religious, cultural, and social ideals within South Africa. This combination of various references is used to engage excess by challenging social, religious, as well as artistic boundaries, typical of the Neo-Baroque.

2.3.3 *Chandelier by Steven Cohen*

Cohen is a homosexual Jewish male artist who uses his body to engage with issues around body politics through public performance art (Blignaut 2003:40). It has been noted that Cohen breaks the boundaries of what is deemed appropriate conduct in society, and his intention is to arouse disbelief, horror, and revulsion in his audience (MacKenny 2001:102). The viewer is shocked into awareness about sexual politics and body politics, as Cohen exhibits his legal right to freedom of expression as a South African artist (MacKenny 2001:103). Cohen's performances transgress the norms of gender constructs by combining both male and female attributes and behaviour in his performances, mostly by wearing female clothing in such a way that it emphasises his male body.

In Cohen's work the violent attitudes which many homosexual people experience in their everyday lives are highlighted, breaking social boundaries and spaces that align with the Neo-Baroque discourse. Cohen deliberately challenges the masculine ideals prescribed by patriarchal social systems through the use of drag outfits in his performances (Du Plessis [sa]:21). He draws attention to the taboos that enforce notions about the sexualised body by making what is regarded as private body parts and activities public. In threatening the dominant male ideal, he makes the male body vulnerable and thereby open to reconstruction (Du Plessis [sa]:38). In this work the body appears to express emotion in a spectacularly sexualised and gendered way (Van der Watt [sa]:103), which aligns with Neo-Baroque ideals.

Figure 7: Steven Cohen, *Chandelier*, 2002.
(Steven Cohen artist [Sa]).

The performance piece *Chandelier* (Figure 7) bombards the viewer with multiple references and signs, to the point of excess. Cohen's elaborate, exuberant costume is made out of a reconstructed chandelier, an icon of Western wealth, and as such references the Baroque style (Sassen2003:26&Ndalianis 2004:[sp]). The Star of David on the artist's forehead, the high heel shoes, exposed genitals and drag-like outfit have multiple implications, which are seen as disturbing within dominant social systems.

This particular performance took place in Johannesburg in an informal settlement which was being torn down and the residents forcefully relocated by the government (Sassen2003:26). As it became dark the city lights emphasised the chandelier spectacle, the combination of merged media and technology alone placing the work within a Neo-Baroque context. Cohen's white figure created a harsh distinction against the evening background, city lights, and the scene of despair, a place without the luxury of modern electricity. According to Buci-Glucksmann (1994:23) the Baroque often used themes of 'devastation, chaos, and ruin'. In this piece, Cohen draws on these same themes by contrasting his body with the demolition of the settlement, as the chaos and the emotional and physical wreckage left behind. The conscious selection of light, an important Baroque feature, as a strong visual element in the work further creates dramatic contrasts which makes Cohen appear even more obvious against the despair and poverty of the now-homeless residents (Van der Watt [sa]:106).

This work also reveals a Baroque sense of artificiality, and plays on the constructed nature of social reality. At the same time, it expresses a deep sense of melancholy and anxiety about current circumstances in South Africa which, according to Buci-Glucksmann (1994:23), is another Baroque characteristic. The spectacle draws the attention of the viewer as it comes across as "half beautifully-imagined and half horribly-real", and the contrast emphasises the reality of what has happened here (Sassen2003:27). The manner in which Cohen questions the everyday reality of such an event and adapts it to a cultural context in order to contest devastating incidents such as these, links to Neo-Baroque approaches and postmodern concerns. The work becomes excessive on various levels, as people are forced to acknowledge the travesty of such actual events happening within their own country; while his dramatic drag costume, barely covering his genitals, forces the viewer to acknowledge his homosexuality.

The work carries numerous connotations and signs, some of which appear to be random or out of place, such as the lion's head and skin, a hunting trophy linked to male patriarchal society. The chandelier is an incongruous element, as its usual function is to be used for indoor lighting in homes of the affluent; but here it is used in the opposite context, namely outdoors in a

poverty-stricken area. The image is bizarre, as Cohen re-figures himself and appears out of place in relation to the informal settlement as well as the cityscape in the distance. His arms are stretched up towards the sky, while his legs are spread as he is stands over the head of the lion. Cohen's elaborately detailed chandelier costume draws the viewer's attention. The chandelier and Cohen's body becomes the point of focus, his arms and legs create diagonal lines that lead the eye beyond the limits of the frame in both the recorded performance and the photographic still (Figure 7).

Cohen takes on an angel-like quality, which according to Buci-Glucksmann (1994:60) is a symbol in Baroque art often used to indicate the Other, homosexual and bisexual. As a Jewish homosexual, Cohen is the classic Other against the existing Christian, heterosexual structures of masculinity and patriarchal society. Cohen's desire to create a response or emotional reaction from the viewer by challenging social boundaries, and in some cases transgressing these social limits, are indicative of a Neo-Baroque aesthetic (De Villiers 2008:8,17). These social margins are transgressed through excess, highlighting underlying tensions within society about homosexuality and body politics. Cohen's figure becomes an inscription of difference, a hybrid form amongst the squatter people.

Baroque stylistic characteristics and themes are clearly referenced in *Chandelier* particularly in the manner in which the work manages to reveal splendour amongst chaos and misery, possibly used to create an emotional response in the viewer. The work highlights the realities of South African life, unveiling the oppression and violence within. Like most of Cohen's work, this performance is dependent on visual display. He creates unease relating to issues around identity to highlight its constructed nature and query the truth of our reality, so well hidden within society (Van der Watt [sa]:107) - as did the historical Baroque.

His performance actively involves and engages the people around him as he interacts with the observing squatter people and enters into their space (Figure 8). This allows for an open narrative with the centre of focus depending on the spectator. Cohen moves in and out of the camera frame showing a lack of respect for its limits and the activity in the background extends beyond the video frame with little regard for composition and the limitation of the video frame. This shows the intense visual directness in Neo-Baroque attitudes towards spectacle (Ndalianis 2004) and allows Cohen to challenge the boundaries surrounding body politics in South Africa by forcing people to see and acknowledge him as a homosexual male.

The multiple references, as well as the combination of performance art with new media firmly situate the work within the Neo-Baroque genre and create a new hybrid art form. The use of

Cohen's own body makes the experience seem perceptually to be more real, blurring the line between reality and illusion. This artifice is used to shock and engage the viewer, since once the performance begins to seem more real than reality itself, it is also more disturbing as it directly confronts society with issues it would rather ignore.

Figure 8: Steven Cohen, *Chandelier*, 2002.
(Steven Cohen artist [Sa]).

The surplus layers of meaning within the work draw on current concerns within South Africa, intending to leave the viewer in a state of questioning in the hope of initiating change within the country. Cohen applies postmodern forms of representation to his work in exploiting self-awareness and self-reference. This is achieved through the use of excess, by placing his own body in his artwork to contest issues of identity, gender, and sexuality which relate to him, as well as to society in general. Levine (1974:36) maintains that rhetorical devices create unexpected, shocking, and revolutionary images that may be used to create social awareness. According to Degli-Esposti (1996b:78) these characteristics are typical of the Neo-Baroque aesthetic of excess.

2.3.4 *Oracle by MinnetteVári*

Vári is a white female South African artist who mainly works with new media. Her videos and digital prints, in conjunction with performance art, question her own identity and history within a South African context. The medium of video makes it possible to direct the gaze at social constructs which assemble self-identity and to query the principles used to establish differences and bodily ideals (Neubauer 2004:93). Vári uses her own body within her work not only as an entity but as a subject as well, which is by no means unbiased, as there are many connotations attached to the white African female body (Geer 2004:11).

In the video installation *Oracle*, (1999) (Figures 9 and 10) Vári manipulates and digitally alters video and digital media. Van der Watt (2004b:32) describes the video performance as showing Vári's nude body eating and indulging in what at first seems to be a piece of flesh. However, upon closer inspection the viewer discovers her ingesting changing news clips that spill out behind her. The figure seems unable to digest everything which she takes; she spits out mouthfuls while all the time ingesting more. Vári contrasts various forms of media communication so often used by dominant society to form public recollections with personal experiences, indicating the manipulation by mass media of individual and social ideas (Neubauer 2004:96).

An oracle, according to various mythologies or beliefs, is a person who is considered to be wise and gives predictions or prophetic advice on the future. In some cultures, an oracle is seen to be a form of divinity, or inspired by the gods, or even a portal through which the gods speak (Oracle [sa]). In this case it appears as if the oracle is eating her words or stories as a comment on how media reports should not be taken as true or unbiased. By extension it appears that Vári is questioning the reality of previous events which occurred in South Africa and so reveals the way some stories have been constructed or shaped to accommodate a particular point of view rather than the truth or reality.

Figure 9: Minnette Vári, *Oracle*, 1999.
(Geers 2004:48).

According to Van der Watt (2004b:32) the figure in the video gives a cannibalistic impression, which could refer to issues of post-colonial identity and Othering, combining various elements into a hybrid self. Vári, in this sense, turns herself into the Other, as her appearance and behaviour does not reflect dominant ideals. The naked, seemingly primitive body, with its connotations of excess, arouses shock and a sense of the uncanny within the viewer, as one is here confronted by both the familiar and unfamiliar (Van der Watt 2004a:123).

The different media images as well as Vári's figure create a disjointed effect, at first reflecting a confusing narrative; but upon closer inspection a sense of cohesion can be found. It could be argued that the figure in *Oracle* struggles to accept and absorb the various contrasting sections of inconsistent records that have been given to her. During this process the original self is influenced by the media narratives she has been forced to take in, changing her own views about past events, showing how people often define themselves in relation to social and cultural situations (Van der Watt 2004b:32). Vári's actions become the main point of focus in this work, used to establish movement and create a sense of unity. The figure and its actions appear strange and bizarre, distinctive features of the Baroque.

Neubauer (2004:97) says the work can be seen as a reflection of South African society's lack of concern about the disturbing events regularly displayed in the today's popular media. Degli-Esposti (1996b:82) states that the element of the uncanny forms part of the divide that Baroque representation stirs in the viewer. She (1996b:79) adds that the Neo-Baroque creates confusion by morphing different elements to generate a reaction which attracts and repulses the viewer at the same time, resulting in the viewer placing him- or herself at a distance. In this particular artwork, the viewer is made to feel uncomfortable, yet is unable to look away.

Figure 10: Minnette Vári, *Oracle*, 1999.
(Geers 2004:53).

Minnette Vári's digital video creates new imagery by combining the old news clips with new video editing techniques to direct the viewer's attention towards the issues that affect her own personal identity. Vári's main concern seems to be with the representation of her own country, which is also a reflection upon herself and all South Africans (Neubauer 2004:94). By drawing attention to the mass media's view of South Africa, she is also questioning the reality and truth of this projected image.

In her work Vári questions both reality and dominant society's control over the media and the country's history. Vári makes use of new digital technologies to create new hybrid forms that reveal a self-reflection of her own identity and her views about contemporary South Africa. The artist challenges perspectives of South African history as portrayed by the media from an individual perspective, in describing the country's continuously changing circumstances as a whole (Geers 2004:12). Vári makes use of postmodern ideals of self-reference in combination with post-colonial concerns and Neo-Baroque aesthetics to create new hybrid art forms that are used to contest issues which she feels need to be resolved.

It is possible to detect a Neo-Baroque aesthetic in Vári's work in several ways. Most obviously, it can be found in her use of new media which embraces advances in digital production, such as the manner in which she morphs various images together to create complex imagery used to draw the viewer's attention. The actions of the *Oracle* figure become the source of motion

within the work, typical of the Baroque in which a single body's action establishes movement within the work, as the composition has been planned around this.

As in some Baroque compositions, *Oracle* appears initially to have no cohesion, but on closer inspection unity can be found in the underlying theme which questions the truth about media events in South Africa. The uncanny is used as a means to disturb and make the viewer question the reality of the events as depicted by the media. It becomes evident that Vári's work reflects a concern about events happening within the country, and the lack of unease these have created in South African society. In this way, her work may be seen as a reaction to and a reflection of current circumstances in South African society due to political and social influences at the time.

2.4 Conclusion

As an art style the Neo-Baroque appears to have integrated some areas of contemporary South African art, as may be seen in the wide variety of applications accessed by these artists. Thematically their works relate to body politics, revealing a sense of self-reflection. Many of the concerns expressed by the artists around issues of sexuality, gender, race, and identity are carried through from postmodern and post-colonial discourses.

What makes the works particularly Neo-Baroque is the artists' uses of extravagance, surplus and aesthetic beauty. These form a stark contrast to other postmodern styles which tend towards minimalism (Neo/Baroque 2005). Neo-Baroque works become overabundant, not always due to dynamic spectacle or overworking, but also through the way in which they include multiple connotations. This results in a density, which often leaves the viewer in a state of disbelief. Some South African artists have adopted a Neo-Baroque aesthetic of excess, while at the same time aligning with and incorporating new media trends and current technological advancements.

The above artists can be seen to have incorporated Neo-Baroque stylistic characteristics as a means of expressing their concerns about issues and body politics within South Africa. These artists have used layers of meaning with multiple references and media to create new hybrid art forms. Some artists have made use of public performance combined with new media to create a realistic effect that is well-suited to merge the distinction between truth and fantasy. As such it questions dominant ideologies and reality itself. These multi-layered multi-media works are most often extravagant and spectacular, drawing on the spectator's emotions, while at times literally invading their space, as with Baroque art which aimed to engulf its audience. The most obvious difference is in the social, economic and political circumstances from which these two forms of Baroque aesthetics arose as well as the incorporation of new media (like video and

digital art) in combination with more traditional art forms (like performance and sculpture), although both make use of the technology of their times.

Through the analysis of the above examples it became evident that excess could be found in the following ways. Firstly, excess was discovered in form through the surplus of drapery and line in Hlobo's work. Secondly, excess was found in the combination of materials and techniques with emphasis on detail, evident in the works of Cohen, Hlobo, Rose, and Vári, which often referenced the hybrid. Thirdly, excess became apparent in the content, through various implied references and connotations which related to body politics such as gender, race and sexuality. This type of excess often transgresses social boundaries by questioning values within society relating to the body, in some cases drawing on the abject as means of unsettling the viewer. As is clear from the examples cited, the Neo-Baroque also seems peculiarly suited to address issues around body politics, allowing artists to push the boundaries of both art and society to the point of immoderation or transgression. This is seen especially when artists use the body within their art in an often spectacular manner, drawing on the undesirable and unfamiliar to the point of excess, making it an appropriate art form to contest social concerns and renegotiate aspects of identity within South African society. The works attempt to and engage with the viewer on a deeper level - either emotional, psychological, or sensory - often arousing shock as the viewer realises the many implications inherent in the artworks.

In the discussed works, the artists have planned their composition around the actions of a single subject, in a way which is used to establish movement within the work, a Baroque characteristic. In the case of Hlobo, dynamism is created by a single sculptural form in which the folds in the fabric form an abundance of expressive lines that move into the surrounding space. While Cohen, Rose and Vári all use their own bodies as the main subject, this is done to create motion and the tone of the work. These works come across as uncoordinated and at times chaotic, although thematic unity can be found which reveals each artist's social concerns. Cohen and Hlobo both query dominant constructs about sexuality which situate their own bodies in the position of the undesirable or Other. Cohen, Rose, and Vári moreover all question the truth of reality, drawing attention to current and past events not only to expose the reality of these events, but to make society aware of them as well.

Aesthetics of excess is used as a tool by Neo-Baroque artists to question current social conditions and dominant ideologies. They challenge boundaries in an attempt to renegotiate their identities, often resulting in shock and outrage. The emergence of Neo-Baroque artistic trends in South African art reveals that these artists are concerned about current social circumstances. It appears as if artists are turning to Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess to address

their own needs and the unease relating to marginalisation, still present in society. This is clearly in line with international Neo-Baroque trends reflective of globalisation, consumerism, and mass media, which have also impacted significantly on South African society. The nature of an identity crisis which has emerged from the radical changes within South Africa's economic and political realm over the last two decades will form the main argument of the next chapter of this paper.

In the next chapter: *Neo-Baroque: a social crisis*, the use of Baroque elements found particularly within dominant discourses of post-colonialism will be explored in relation to body politics in South Africa. It will be argued that artists are using these characteristics and stylistic traits as a means of resistance to current social circumstances, which expresses a sense of identity crisis similar to the conditions from which the Baroque of the seventeenth century emerged. Both post-colonial and Neo-Baroque approaches to body politics will be reviewed through examples of South African artworks, which are used to express current concerns and underlying anxieties. The intention is to establish whether the Baroque aesthetic of excessmay be used as a creative tool for confronting and resisting the dominant constructs which situate certain bodies as Other, or even in extreme cases, as the abject Other.

CHAPTER 3: THE NEO-BAROQUE AS A SIGN OF SOCIAL CRISIS

In many contemporary artworks the human body is interpreted as a social construct, primarily formed through racial and gendered cultural structures. This is the line where the individual and society meet. In light of South Africa's unstable political and economic changes, artists here explore aspects around the reconstruction of the body in order to reflect the reshaping of the individual, especially within a post-colonial ideal of the self (Oguibe 1999:19). Excess and, often abject, elements are incorporated within their artwork as a strategy to unsettle and disturb social, psychological, and cultural points of view about the body, thus becoming a form of resistance used by artists to contest social concerns.

The media and formats used by artists are already of a hybrid nature, emphasising qualities of excess within their work, often revealing an uncanny, erotic, and abject undertone, which underpin the artists' position in relation to bodily ideals. It seems as if artists seek to overcome the repression of 'undesirable' bodies and sexualities through gaining an understanding of how gender and body constructs are created and maintained. South African artists are exploring their own body politics within their work as a means of understanding themselves and their position within a very particular, localised society.

This chapter aims is to demonstrate whether artists are using Baroque elements and stylistic characteristics in combination with prevailing discourses of post-colonialism and postmodernism; and if their intention is to establish a context for cultural resistance and continued existence through the type of hybridity which manifests through numerous signs and references. Also, a number of South African artists are displaying Neo-Baroque tendencies in their work to express a sense of crisis similar to earlier Baroque trends that became apparent whenever a time of social unease impacted on artists' productivity (Degli-Esposti 1996b:77).

Post-colonial and Neo-Baroque approaches to body politics will be compared within a South African context through analysis of the works of artists Cohen, Mntambo, Hlobo, Farber, and Rose. Theories on the body will be placed within a Neo-Baroque context to reveal how contemporary artists use theories relating to the body to create abject and monstrous forms, so becoming a strategy used to express their social concerns. Resistance within South African artworks will be explored through use of the abject and erotic in this chapter, and use of the hybrid in Chapter Four. This will be examined in relation to the effects of the artwork on the viewers, and their subsequent engagement or reaction to the artwork.

The intention is to establish whether Baroque and excess aesthetic traits are appropriate artistic tools to confront and resist the dominant constructs which situate certain bodies as abject and

Other, such as homosexual and/or black bodies. From this I will argue that artists are turning to Neo-Baroque excess aesthetics, since former post-colonial approaches to body politics have not resolved concerns relating to the body. In this regard the incorporation of Neo-Baroque aesthetics into art becomes essential, particularly when dealing with the process of reconstructing body politics. Due to the discomfort the work may cause, the viewer is forced to reconsider the dominant constructs responsible for marginalising certain people. Through this process, viewers may question their own ideas around these issues, and may even become part of a resistance which will help reconstruct dominant notions.

3.1 Post-colonial body politics

Post-colonialism is a contentious theory embedded in identity politics, dealing with aspects of culture that resulted in countries that were once colonised (Post-colonialism [sa] & Ashcroft 2001:12). For the current research theories concerned with identity politics from a post-colonial viewpoint will focus on the visual arts in South Africa. Tiffin (1995:95) says that the progression of decolonisation in art and literature has been arrested due to the removal process of colonial ideals, post-colonial rising, and the continued application of existing European discourses within these countries. Ashcroft argues (2001:10) that post-colonialism has come to represent the growing awareness of cultural differences in everyday society.

Doy (2000:12) explains that during the colonial period, the colonisers justified their destiny to rule by using binary opposition as a way of viewing the natural inhabitants as subordinate and Other to themselves. In Africa, the black body became a site of the threatening and diseased body, while the notion of the Other became a means to justify Europeans' colonisation of African lands and their people. Neidhardt (2006:[sp]) disputes that the investigation into social concerns, such as gender rights and the African body or the Other, was previously informed by a system of ideas which had been ordered to advantage European patriarchal beliefs around human rights. She (Neidhardt 2006:[sp]) goes on to state that such discourses only gave the impression of moving forward, while actually reinforcing the colonial ideal used to identify the Other.

According to Doy (2000:205), post-colonialism aimed to resolve matters of identity, gender, race, sexuality and ethnicity, or in other words any type of categorisation used for the configuration of the Other. It sought to overcome marginalisation and create a culture free of repression. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995:2) all post-colonial societies are still likely to be affected by some form of 'Neo-colonial' domination. They (Ashcroft, Griffiths &Tiffin 1995:2) also state that post-colonialism is a type of opposition and renewal, explaining

that post-colonial premise can sometimes be seen to cover up or reproduce unfair economic and cultural positions, often recreating unfair colonial control in society. This idea will be explored in relation to reasons why South African artists are still addressing issues relating to body politics in their work.

According to San Juan (1998:7) post-colonial theory denies postmodern models which are used to dissemble central European systems of ideas within society. It aims instead to take apart core colonial ideals, formerly created from systems of binary relations. In taking this approach, post-colonialism weakens the ability to create new types of artistic influence, and also opposition against global disparity and repression. This implies that post-colonialism merely hides the power of dominant ideologies and traditions of consumerism (San Juan 1998:8). San Juan's (1998:23) argument is that post-colonialism can only replicate the common circumstances necessary to uphold the inequalities and their effects in a society. The post-colonial position gives the impression of being independent, but in actuality it is still economically and politically directed by the previous coloniser (San Juan 1998:24).

By being part of the post-colonial discourse, the same should apply to South Africa. After the Apartheid era post-colonial discourses and consumerism rose to prominence (Dodson 2000:412), leading South African society to believe that there was progress and all forms of inequality were being demolished. Although a large percentage of the black population were given privileges that had been denied to them previously (Dodson 2000:419), this merely masked the fact that many of the previous dominant ideologies were and are still present, such as the marginalization of homosexuals. Many ideals relating to gender, race and sexuality still exist and continue to be silently enforced on South African society.

These 'masked' inequalities motivate South African artists to turn to Neo-Baroque aesthetics as a means of resolving these concerns by making society aware of the realities. Some artists choose to challenge the sexuality and gender system of ideas which were implanted by colonial and Apartheid systems, and they intend to create gaps where individuals can express themselves without restraint (Zanele Muholi 2008). If this is true, it would explain why South African artists are still expressing concerns about issues relating to body politics, since these issues have been covered up rather than addressed. This could then be why artists are turning to Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess, as post-colonial approaches have merely given the impression of progress.

According to Du Preez (2011:16) contemporary South Africa still remains a divided society, but is 'mobilising on a scale last seen in the 1980's. He goes on to say that the damage caused by

the current government's reputation for dishonesty has led to mistrust and has left a negative impression in the consciousness of the people, which has resulted in the undermining of South Africa as a lawful and fair country (Du Preez 2011:6). Alexander (2011:28) says that there are indications of an identity crisis in the South African middle classes, and that the 'rainbow nation' is just a diminished ideal. He goes on to explain that currently fewer South Africans believe that it is possible to achieve any sense of unity and social togetherness due to the current circumstances which reveal a heightened social inequality (Alexander 2011:27).

Racism can still be found, creating apprehension amongst South Africans in general (Du Preez 2011:8). Mangcu (2008:41) takes this argument to the extreme by saying that the Apartheid legacy has been reversed, explaining that anyone including black South Africans, who have anything negative to say about the current ruling party is condemned (Mangcu 2008:3). The lack of faith in the government is in part due to numerous scandals, political tensions, and prevailing racism, as well as the economic and social changes which have occurred since the end of the Apartheid regime. This has resulted in an overall sense of uncertainty for the future and crisis, and many South Africans are not sure of their place within their own society.

In its post-colonial era, multicultural South Africa is still troubled by issues relating to body politics and sexuality. Countless people do not conform to hetero-patriarchal values, namely, intimate partnerships must consist of a male and female, and the dominant role is given to the male (Post-colonialism [sa]). Within these societal limitations, the black gay man may represent many powerful and **c**ontradicting beliefs provoking both desire and unease within society (Doy 2000:161). These include the black body as having been represented as threatening and diseased by colonisers; more recently, the associations between the homosexual body and HIV and Aids. Doy (2000:169) also notes that the black male body has been objectified by the male gaze of the white homosexual throughout history. Hence the black male body, within a homosexual context, has become the site of many influential and diverging ideologies which create both desire and apprehension within South African culture (Doy 2000:161),and is therefore received as deviant and abject.

Ideology moreover functions through the mass media where black bodies (male and female) are used to establish ideas of colonial values relating to race and sexuality. Perry (2004:117) says that these popular culture ideologies are capable of alienating people from themselves. It becomes apparent that there are many underlying tensions in South Africa as a result of numerous factors relating to political and social circumstances. These affect all South Africans regardless of race, gender, or sexual identity.

3.1.1 *Constructs used to establish bodily difference*

Kristeva's (2003:391) theory on abjection becomes relevant in the discussion on body politics of difference, since it is this Other 'threatening' body which has been abjected and oppressed by dominant society. The black body, the female body, the homosexual body and the lesbian body have been socially and culturally constructed as abject. According to Ashcroft *et al*, (1995:322) the body has become the actual battleground on which contestation and coercion are being fought, in which bodily difference has been used as a weapon within the power struggles. They also argue (1995:322) that such struggles are often expressed through intersections with race, gender, sexuality, and class in the process of establishing the colonised as a subject, already apparent in the works discussed so far. Kadiatu Kanneh (1995:348) explains that both black and female identities are not simply superficial sites of representation, but actually occupy existent spaces of oppression and resistance. In this chapter, it will become evident that in their work, artists like Hlobo, Cohen, and Mntambo use their 'bodies' as abject objects in an attempt to renegotiate culturally constructed notions about themselves. It will be reinforced that concepts about the body are socially and culturally established, demonstrating that the body can be a powerful tool in the battle for equality and an appropriate means for contesting stereotypical views.

Theorists such as Butler (1956:380) have interpreted heterosexuality as the most culturally desirable sexuality within patriarchal society. Perry (1999:9) explains that sexuality is a word used to explain various forms of sexual desire and behaviour, whether it is toward the opposite or same sex, and regulations of sexual behaviour are established and controlled by dominant society. Butler (2003:393) sees sexuality and gender identity as having a performative role which is driven by prescribed social values and taboos. Perry (1999:9) argues that like race, sexual difference is most often described through terms of binary opposition between men and women within a heterosexual framework. This construction of bodies into binary relation to one another is made to appear as natural within society. Butler (2003:396) agrees that a system of compulsory heterosexuality is created and hidden within society by recreating bodies into categories of difference which are established as normal. According to Doy (2000:156) it is in this context that representations of the female, homosexual and black body are constructed into Other, which represents both desire and threat to dominant society.

Edward Said writes (1995:87) that the Other is used to define the European as its direct opposite and that the relationship which is formed is one of control and dominance (Said 1995:89). This is particularly important as constructs relating to race, gender and sexuality were exploited in South Africa firstly by the colonisers and afterwards by the Apartheid government. Although

such concerns were supposedly addressed by post-colonial discourses, it would appear that these constructs are still present in South African society.

According to Butler (2003:392) the relationship between gender, identity, and sexuality are actively constructed through various prescriptive activities taught through dominant social systems within society, implying that identity is performative (Jones &Stephenson 1999:132). Mahon (2005:49) notes that, throughout history, social constructs have associated the female body with nature, disorder, the flesh, and lust, while the male body is aligned with art, order, the mind, and control. The body suffers cultural construction through regulations, which prescribe how it should behave. According to Ashcroft *et al*, (1995:249) in countless societies, women, as are all colonised subjects, have been conscribed to the position of the Other, i.e. 'colonised' by various forms of patriarchal control. Butler (2003:395) maintains that women, homosexuals, and people of a certain race are placed into an oppressive situation with their activities being labelled erotic or abject. This will become particularly evident in the discussion on the works of Mntambo, Rose and Cohen, in which they enact constructs that situate their bodies in the position of the Other.

Ashcroft (2001:21) takes the argument further by stating that certain ideals are constructed culturally to appear as the "natural order of bodies which have been placed into categories of sex and race which exist in a binary opposition to one another", established as a tool by western society to justify their colonisation. According to Ashcroft *et al* (1995:321), the difference of the post-colonial subject by which they are Othered can be seen most obviously in the way in which bodily appearance and difference are read as un-removable signs of their natural inferiority. Those that do not act in accordance with dominant values of gender and sexuality, as prescribed by culture, are punished and marginalised by society (Butler 2003:399). Artists exploit such body constructs through the use of the body in their work, not only to make society aware of these constructs, but to try and change prescribed ideals around how the body is viewed. This will be discussed in the work of Cohen, Mntambo and Rose, where it will be shown that the use of their own bodies is an effective strategy here.

The body's appearance and construction is politically controlled within a culture by social systems which implement a gender hierarchy and obligatory heterosexuality, according to Butler (1956:380). Similarly, Mahon (2007:13) states that sexuality and sexual desire is not a natural trait in men and women, but rather is discovered through family and social environment. Butler (1956:380) continues by explaining that the body is constructed through "a series of exclusions",or, in other words, through their difference, from which certain bodies will stand outside the criteria of selection (Butler 1956:376). These bodies are seen as undesirable and

therefore abject in relation to the constructs from within which the normative heterosexual body is fixed. The gay body is considered to be the most noticeable of these distorted and abject bodies which are excluded from dominant society (Jones & Stephenson 1999:173). In South Africa, as well as internationally, homosexual people are still discriminated against and marginalised due to their sexual orientation.

Film theorist Mulvey (1989:xi) states that the female body and black body are constructed as fetish objects of desire, to be owned and controlled by the male erotic gaze. However, the black body obtained negative associations in which the black female body was equated with prohibited sexuality and the enslaved body, while the black male body was equated to sexual, animalistic prowess and therefore abject and erotic (Mahon 2005:220).

The abject and eroticism will be explored in this chapter in relation to the body through the artists' work, from the perspective of whether these themes are appropriate in order to address social issues, and their appropriateness for adopting Neo-baroque aesthetics. Although such ideas have frequently been explored by artists, there seems to be little investigation within a South African Neo-Baroque art context.

Mahon (2007:13) explains that although sexual desire is an essential part of human behaviour, society places restrictions and boundaries on the body, controlled by rules of acceptable sexual conduct where certain acts are seen as unacceptable, even taboo. Taking this viewpoint further, Mahon (2007:12) argues that sexuality, sexual desire, and the body, have the power to upset society's boundaries and are therefore seen as a threat. This will become evident in the works of Cohen, Rose, and Mntambo. Bataille (1986:18) explains that like the abject body and the Other, eroticism is a cultural construct controlled by dominant social systems which establish such constructs as taboo, aimed at regulating social order and regulating the body. The transgression of these taboos and boundaries forms the main focus of eroticism and abjection (Mahon 2005:13). Since Calabrese (1992:49) argues that excess can be seen as the breaking of boundaries, it is worthwhile taking into consideration that the abject and eroticism contribute to excess.

Eroticism can therefore be a position of power, where power is established and resisted as it becomes an enticing means of going against social, sexual, gender and racial stereotypes (Mahon 2005:37). This may be used as a form of resistance. Calabrese (1992:59) notes that themes of sexuality and erotic excess are known technique of unsettling social values, and are used as an approach by artists working within the Neo-Baroque style. This will be demonstrated within this paper. It is worth considering whether the abject and the erotic, when approached

from a Neo-baroque aesthetic, could be an appropriate form of resistance within South African art, as both are often used by artists to transgress social limits and because both question value systems through excess.

Bolt-Irons (1995:233) cites Bataille as interpreting eroticism as the point of tension between the animal body and the civilised body, as is abjection. In other words man would rather not see himself as an animal, but as a being whose intellect and decades of 'civilising' makes him superior and more than just a mere animal; therefore erotic instincts are seen as primal and uncivilised. Mahon (2007:13) writes that Bataille also describes eroticism as human beings' "conflict with themselves as erotic urges terrify them". Human sexuality is restricted by social customs that consider certain acts prohibited; transgression of these taboos is at the very centre of eroticism. Foucault (1978:6) believes that sex is suppressed, forbidden and kept quiet within society, arguing that the mere fact that one is speaking about is seen as deliberate transgression.

According to Mahon (2007:262) erotic art consequently offers the ideal space for homosexual identity and for exploring aspects of the body deemed unnatural and abject. Bodies such as the homosexual body, which display colour, femininity, and illicit sexuality, are connected in the sense that they are all suitably removed from culture and society (Jones &Stephenson 1999:99). Due to aspects of their identity and body, the artists to be discussed tend to reveal an aspect of exclusion which they themselves feel or can relate to, which they then attempt to make visible to the public in the hope of reconstructing body politics. From this it becomes apparent that there are various aspects to consider when reviewing artworks which deal with post-colonialism and body politics. In this paper it will be investigated whether this also applies within a Neo-baroque aesthetic of excess, and whether it expresses some sort of identity crisis in South Africa.

Jones (1993:202) notes that within the context of our everyday society, sexual identity and difference are established through popular culture representations, which impose certain social values. It is especially through the mass media that visual representations support dominant constructs such as heterosexuality. Bodies that are seen as different or Other are considered deviant and are used to rationalize the individual's exclusion from society. However, people who are marginalized because of their difference try to make their identities clear by uncovering the body politics which enforce difference (Jones 1993: 202). Bhabha (1995:32) says that the place of difference and Otherness is never entirely on the outside but rather its position is in a constant state of fluctuation, on the border between outside and inside. The fluid nature of such constructs of difference make it possible to change, reposition, and even reconstruct these notions within society, making it possible for artists to play a part in the renegotiation of

politics of bodily difference (such as gender, race, and sexual difference) within society. It is by applying pressure and drawing attention to this border (the boundary between bodily differences) that unease and discomfort is created within the viewer. It is moreover through the transgression of these boundaries that excess can be accommodated.

3.2 The approach of South African artists to body politics

The South African artists whose work will be discussed challenge and resist the dominant constructs about the body which have been brought forward from colonial times and embedded in modern society. They appear to be exploring new ways to express these concerns, as many years after colonisation and Apartheid these constructs are still present and not completely resolved. It appears as if these artists have turned to the Neo-Baroque as an alternative approach to the postmodern methods previously used. Excess is used, often in combination with the abject and eroticism, as a shock tactic to make society realise that these issues are still present and need to be addressed.

3.2.1 *The rape of Europa and Narcissus by Nandipha Mntambo*

Mntambo interrogates typical representations of the female body and the socially prescribed values which many women subject themselves to (Perryer 2005: [sp]). In society women are often defined according to their bodily appearance and made subordinate to men. In order to better understand Mntambo's approach, the following should be considered. Irigaray (1985:25) maintains that female sexuality and women's difference to men is always in operation although there is hardly ever any acknowledgement of such differences; Neidhardt adds (2006:[sp]) that the black body has always been represented under the control of the colonial and dominant white male gaze. Mntambo controls how she is represented by using of her own body as subject. In this way, she is able to renegotiate and challenge current boundaries in body politics, thereby empowering herself (Nandipha Mntambo Ingabisa 2007).

Both *The rape of Europa* (figure 11) and *Narcissus* (Figure 12), were created in 2009. In these works Mntambo uses images of herself and her body as a form of self-exploration to portray her view on current body politics. Mntambo digitally manipulates her own female body into a minotaur-like creature, which according to the title references Zeus as a bull.

In *The rape of Europa*, the narrative of Europa's abduction by Zeus is retold (Vundla 2009:3). The digital image shows a nude Mntambo lying on her back on the ground, staring up at her own digitally enhanced image of herself as Zeus as a bull, who is overpowering her in an aggressive manner. *The rape of Europa* was a common theme in the Baroque era, portrayed by

artists such as Albani Francesco (1578-1660), Paolo Veronese (1528-1586), Francois Boucher (1703-1770) and also may be seen to draw on Picasso's (1881-1973) sketch entitled *The minotaur caressing a girl*.In *Narcissus*, the artist gazes at her own reflection in the semblance of Zeus as bull (Nandipha Mntambo 2009), and draws on the painting of the same title by Baroque artist Caravaggio. Caravaggio's *Narcissus* (1597-1599) shows a young boy in a similar crouched position gazing at his own reflection in a river. Here Mntambo is referencing – or 'recycling' - Baroque artworks, but with the use of modern digital technology she has created her own version of the images, adapting them to create unique works through self-reference and digital manipulation.
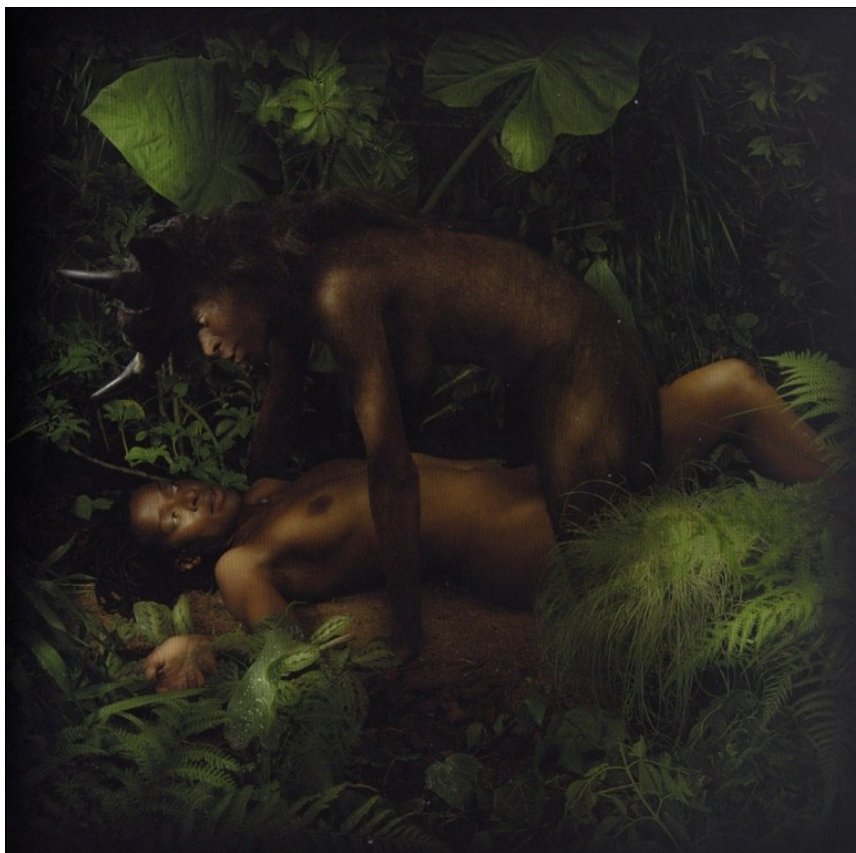
Figure 11: Nandipha Mntambo, *The rape of Europa*, 2009.
Courtesy of Michael Stevenson Gallery.
(Nandipha Mntambo 2009).

Figure 12: Nandipha Mntambo, *Narcissus*, 2009.
Courtesy of Michael Stevenson Gallery.
(Nandipha Mntambo 2009).

According to Greek mythology Narcissus, the descendant of the river god Cephisus, was known for his beauty (The myth of Narcissus [sa]). According to the myth Narcissus knelt down to drink at a river and saw his own reflection in the water, and became entranced by the reflection of his own beauty (The myth of Narcissus [sa]). Whenever he tried to get closer to the beauty he saw and touch the image in the water, it would disappear in ripples. Since he could not acquire the object that he yearned for, he died next to the river from sorrow. The Roman myth is similar, except that he fell in love with his own reflection as punishment for rejecting Echo and other previous suitors (Vecchio 2006). In Mntambo's version of *Narcissus,* she is seen gazing at her animal-like self. The question may be asked whether she sees herself as monstrous, ugly or animal-like, or whether she sees or is searching for the beauty in what society deems as Other and abject.

The rape of Europa relates to the myth of Zeus and Europa. In accordance with Greek mythology, Zeus was the 'father of Gods and men' the God of sky and thunder (Zeus [sa]), he could be seen as the archetypal male. Zeus fell in love with the Phoenician princess Europa when he saw her gathering flowers by the sea (Europa the Phoenician princess [sa]). Zeus

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transformed himself into a white bull and appeared by the sea shore, where Europa was playing with her maidens. He gently walked over to Europa and knelt in front of her; she proceeded to spread flowers around his neck and then dared to climb onto his back. He seduced her in order to take advantage of her innocence. Zeus immediately abducted Europa ferrying her to the island of Crete where he divulged his true identity and transformed himself into his human form. In human form and against her will, he made Europa his lover (Europa the Phoenician princess [sa]).

It is evident that Mntambo is referencing this narrative, but is subverting the myth, as she makes use of her own digitally manipulated body as Zeus and her natural self as Europa. The Baroque version presents Zeus as a white bull and Europa as a white European female, whereas Mntambo represents herself twice: as Europa and as Zeus. However, in this instance Zeus is not a white male bull but a black bull with female breasts. Uncertainty is provoked as to whether this hermaphrodite figure presented as a bull is male or female, so the form becomes ambiguous. The position of Zeus over Europa is masculine, aggressive and dominant, and implies the act of rape, as indicated by the work's title. Rape is an immoral and illegal activity within society, and rapists are seen as Other and abject.

According to Kristeva (1982:9) the abject is a borderline, and any form of ambiguity in which an individual's social or cultural state is questioned may be seen as abject. In *The rape of Europa* the gender ambiguity and the insinuation of sexual activity between a human and a non-human form is seen as abject. Calabrese (1992:59) maintains that by pushing on boundaries created by society, excess is created. Such a strategy is moreover typical of the Neo-Baroque, especially when using sexual transgressions. This work causes further confusion as Mntambo appears as both protagonist and antagonist, both rapist and victim, thereby implying that she is about to rape herself. Within this context it is tempting to consider whether Mntambo is possibly referring to self-destructive behaviour where one's actions negatively impact on the self, whether emotionally or physically. The work leaves the viewer to consider numerous connotations.

Both *The rape of Europa* (Figure 11) and *Narcissus* (Figure 12) have a common element in that both works question Mntambo's view of herself. They reveal a self-reflective inner struggle as Mntambo represents herself as Other with animal-like attributes. This is typical of a postmodern approach, which makes use of self-representation and self-analysis. Also, the manner in which Mntambo questions and transgresses social boundaries relating to body constructs may be seen as a post-colonial approach. The pushing of boundaries is moreover distinctive of the Neo-baroque, as a means to generate excess.

Mntambo also incorporates and comments on theories relating to the gaze in the work. Clearly, to the viewer she constructs an image of herself gazing at herself within an image, so the act of gazing occurs on multiple levels of meaning. Previously, the gaze was recognised as being from the dominant white male perspective; the female gaze, the queer gaze, and the black gaze were never given due consideration (Atkinson & Breitz 1999:287). In most African traditional cultures it is considered polite to briefly look at a person when communicating with them, but staring or openly engaging with someone eye to eye is considered disrespectful (Martin 2010:[sp]). When considering the black gaze, according to bell hooks (2003:95), it has become necessary that the marginalized black body should return the gaze of the colonisers and develop a "critical gaze" in order to challenge dominant heterosexual social constructions about the black body. Neidhardt (2006:[sp]) applies bell hooks' view on the "critical gaze" when arguing that the black female body and the queer body should also take this position in their approach to gender and sexual politics.

Both bell hooks and Neidhardt use perspectives on the gaze from the context of the black body. Ngcobo (2006a:[sp]) maintains that it is necessary for black and gay artists to take on a radical stance by creating a discursive space for marginalized South African people, by looking at themselves in order to contribute to a more equal gender, and to sexual politics of representation. The gaze has hence become a site of resistance for colonised black people globally as a means of racial enhancement in the struggle for equality (bell hooks 2003:95). In a post-Apartheid South African the gaze is being used to establish the notion of the African body from a subject who can only receive information about themselves to a black body beginning to return the gaze (Neidhardt2006:[sp]& bell hooks 2003:99).

According to Mulvey (1989:15), the gaze denies individuality and is an aspect to consider when reviewing colonialism, as well as sexual, racial and gender constructs. Within this context the gaze turns people into objects to be controlled rather than subjects capable of speaking for themselves as individuals. Irigaray states (1985:224) that a woman has no gaze and so no discourse for her own creation that would allow her to identify with herself. According to bell hooks (2003:94), in the past South African black people's right to gaze was repressed by the dominant white society. Neidhardt (2006:[sp]) maintains that the gaze covers up sexual and gender differences between bodies. Accordingly, the gaze can be seen as an important aspect for consideration when representing the female or black body and, if used appropriately, can be used to reconstruct notions relating to body ideals.

Following Mahon's (2005:51) writings it will be argued that the gaze should not be seen only from a negative perspective; the context of the gaze may be shifted to strengthen the artist's

message by using eroticism as a means of undermining social, cultural, racial and sexual constructs. This could be an important aspect to consider in South African visual arts, as potentially becoming an appropriate means to express the artist's concerns and efforts to reconstruct notions around the body. Artists are aware of these constructs within society and deliberately exploit them to stir a reaction within the viewer. The gaze therefore becomes an important element to consider when analysing an artwork, particularly when the body is central to the artwork, as the gaze can be used to not only enforce prescribed bodily constructs, but can also be used to contest them.

According to Perry (1999:27) the male gaze is seen as the structuring principle for the representation of women, constructing woman's bodies to suit male pleasure. Perry (2004:144) goes on to say that the objectifying dominant male gaze constructs the female body through notions of desire and difference. This pleasure in looking becomes a perversion, a form of eroticism (Freud 1953:157), generally referred to as voyeurism. According to Kristeva (1982:46) voyeurism is used to establish notions of the abject, as well as establishing certain bodies as fetishist objects which arouse erotic desire (Mulvey 1989:xi). Perry (2004:145) furthermore argues that gender sexual identity is constructed around the visible presence of bodily difference. Sexuality, sexual desire and the body are all established as a menace to civilized society, and when represented in the form of erotic art, have the power to defy social systems, so making them a useful aid for resistance (Mahon 2005:12). The essence of eroticism lies in the transgression of taboos surrounding sexuality and sexual desire (Mahon 2005:13). Mntambo uses these ideas to form a site of resistance to contest social values about the black female body, in an attempt to change misperceptions about the female body.

Mntambo engages with these notions of the gaze as in *The rape of Europa* she portrays herself not only as a victimized subject, but also as the aggressor. The gaze is turned back on herself, as she looks at her self-manipulated, animal-like reflection, revealing how dominant ideals have constructed her body and affected her own view about her body. In the past, the black female body was constructed as being aligned with nature, as having prohibited sexuality as well as being controlled by its 'instinctive' urges (Mahon 2005:220). It seems as if Mntambo is scrutinizing her own image of herself, still deciding how she should view herself and her body. It could be argued that she is critically reconstructing her image of herself. At the same time, she is reviewing the constructs established about the black female body during the colonial period which are carried through to the present day.

Disprose (1991:160) says that reflection is a form of excess through repetition and is most often used to represent the border between the self and the world, mind and body, and between the self and Other. In this case, it could be said that the reflection draws on the self as Other in accordance with Mntambo's view of herself and the way in which she feels the world sees her body. According to Lacan (1977:3) the mirror image reveals the threshold of the visible world and the role of the mirror in the appearance of the double image is used to develop psychological realities. In *Narcissus,* the water acts like a mirror as it reflects Zeus's image, giving the viewer a glimpse of Mntambo's view about herself.

According to Vundla (2009:3), in these two works 'scenarios of self-love and self-hatred come to the fore'. The works provoke questions relating to what bodily qualities society deems beautiful or unattractive, intentionally making the viewers question their own bodily ideals. Mntambo comments on how women are defined by their appearance in society. This can be seen in our everyday environment, as society is surrounded by images in the media, advertisements, and television which portray images of women and how they should look and behave. Many women try to live up to these expectations and manipulate their bodies to suit societal ideals (Farber 2003:[sp]). Mntambo's work probes these notions by portraying her female body as both hairy and animal like, both seen as abject qualities in a female in society (Shelton 1995:114). The hairiness suggests that Mntambo is turning herself into a beast or monster. It shouldbe noted thenthat excess is not only present because of the mirror created by the reflection, but also in the reconstruction of her body into the monstrous Other.

The female body has been diminished throughout most of history and her anatomical difference to the male body has defined her and placed her in position of Other, constructing her body with negative associations. Mntambo makes use of this notion by turning her figure into Zeus as a bull, both traditionally constructed as dominant males, here showing an aggressive male stance. However, they have been digitally manipulated to have obvious female body characteristics, such as breasts, so subverting traditional male and female roles. Mntambo hence places her female figure in male and female roles, as she enacts both the traditional female victim as well as the male conqueror. She appears to be questioning the importance of defining such roles of gender within society, rather than being placed on equal grounds.

As a site of contestation, the "abject" is a term first coined by theorist Kristeva (2003:389), and refers to the human reaction to the threatened collapse in meaning caused by a loss of separation between self and Other. The black female body has been represented as the exotic Other, the abject body which carries disease (Neidhardt 2006). The colonial Other, an intimidating body

which threatens to break through the boundaries of hetero-patriarchal norms, may be seen to have links to the abject which also terrorises through the destruction of cultural boundaries. In this way, both the black body and the female body are forms which may arouse fear and horror in the viewer (MacKenny 2001:103). Mntambo clearly takes control of the representation of her body and directs the way the viewer encounters the depiction of her body. Mntambo can be seen to provide a voice and assert a space for the black female body after hundreds of years of objectification and domination by men and colonisers (Ngcobo 2006b). In both *The rape of Europa* and *Narcissus,* Mntambo turned her female body, traditionally a site of desire and even the erotic, into a beast-like form which arouses abject connotations. The work creates a tension between notions of attraction and repulsion. Here Mntambo has represented visually Kristeva's ideas on the abject.

Freud (1957:368) says that the uncanny arouses dread and draws on feelings of revulsion much like the abject, which post-colonial writers such as Enwezor (1999:247) have shown relate to the establishing of Othering through binary opposition. According to Kristeva (1982:4), the abject can be seen as a representation of that which is repressed deep down in our subconscious. She (Kristeva1982:4) argues that the abject relates to that which interrupts identity as well as social systems and orders. Abjection is part of the development from which people develop their own sense of self (Cohen, Hancock &Tyler 2006:116). Kristeva (2003:390) states that although the abject does not exist outside of the self, it still threatens the self and the self's order in relation to the biological, social or spiritual order. She continues that these abject qualities are established as perverse, Other and taboo within culture (Kristeva 1982:45).

Bataille (cited in Kristeva 1982:64) links the production of the abject to a person's weakness to transgress that which is forbidden by social order. Kristeva (1982:12) explains that the 'abject confronts us with those fragile states where people stray along the territories of the animal', which create the space in which social boundaries and taboos are threatened and transgressed by means of the abject and the erotic. Taking this argument further, she says that the abject becomes a perversion which is eroticised and transformed into the site of the Other (Kristeva 1982:54). This is what Mntambo demonstrates in her work, by using the Other to highlight notions which structure her body as abject.

Considering that boundaries can become powerful sites of transformation and of potentially important interventions (Cohen, Hancock &Tyler 2006:115) it is possible to show how art, in exploring and breaking boundaries, and in engaging with the abject, may become a powerful force in addressing social issues (MacKenny 2001:102). Art as a means of transgressing

boundaries by using the abject to affect social change links to the Neo-Baroque, which challenges boundaries and limits through excess, and often disturbing social systems as does the abject. Calabrese (1992:59) emphasises that when the Neo-Baroque displays themes of sexuality, it often uses excess aesthetics of the erotic and the ugly. It can be argued that the abject may be used as a device for transformation, as it also deals with issues not accepted by society at large. Transgression as creative freedom is not a new approach within the arts; it was also a necessary aspect of modernism. Within a Neo-Baroque framework, transgression manifests itself in the form of the abject, which may appear in a number of ways, particularly within the framework of identity, where it often refers to radical Othering in the context of race and sexuality.

Mntambo's work demonstrates and negotiates freedom from the restrains of oppressive forms of femininity, encouraging a critique of feminine and body politics within society. It suggests ways in which black women are able to re-interpret their bodies and establish their own form of visual representation (Ngcobo 2006a), by embracing abject qualities associated with the black female body and forcing the viewer to confront the stereotypical views created during the colonial period (Nandipha Mntambo Ingabisa 2007). This allows her to challenge and subvert preconceptions regarding the representation of the female body as a fetish object of desire and disrupt traditional perceptions of attraction and repulsion related to ideal bodily qualities, which share notions of eroticism and the abject.

According to Hunt (1991:5) female eroticism is directly linked to body politics and is seen as disturbing as it blurs the lines between public and private, mainly due to society constructing female eroticism as taboo and secret. Female artists such as Mntambo use their own bodies, traditionally fetishised, objectified and categorised as taboo in society and Western art, as a means of reclaiming the female body and empowering it. Mahon (2007:208) explains that female, black, and homosexual artists have learnt to embrace the 'body's biological, unruly and undesirable qualities' which masculinity and cultured society find so threatening. Kristeva (in Jones &Stephenson 1999:135) acknowledges the artist's ability to destabilise categories of beauty and the normative female body, which is what Mntambo achieves through her art. Mntambo's work embodies both ideas of abjection and eroticism as she transgresses society's boundaries and celebrates her body and her sexuality. It can be said that Mntambo approaches post-colonial concerns about the black female body by turning her body into an abject, monstrous form becoming excessive, rather similar to Neo-Baroque aesthetics.

In Mntambo's earlier works, she made sculptures with moulded cowhide[12].The digital works, *The rape of Europa* and *Narcissus*, embrace modern technological advances in the digital art media, which is a Neo-Baroque trait. The realistic manner in which she has juxtaposed herself against her digitally manipulated animalistic or monstrous bull-like self as Zeus provokes questions relating to reality and illusion in our everyday lives. In her work, Mntamb o challenges the representation of body politics within South African art through the use of innovative digital technologies and programmes, and also in the way she has transformed her body into a hairy animal-form with human resemblance. Eco (2007:15) states that hybrid creatures, whose appearance is a mix of the formal features of different species, have always been labelled as ugly and thereby abject. These images, with the bull-human figure, demonstrate an abject and even erotic aspect, as they reveal the human for what it is: an animal body, capable of aggressive behaviour and possessing the same sexual urges and needs as other animals. No matter how civilising constructs attempt to change human nature, these instincts and urges will always be present (Kristeva 1982:12).

Similarities can be drawn between eroticism and the abject, as may be seen in Bataille's theory of eroticism and Kristeva's theory on the abject. According to Bataille (1986:29), "Eroticism [is] an immediate aspect of inner experience as contrasted with animal sexuality", meaning that eroticism in human consciousness is that awareness which causes us to question our very being and existence. This includes our values which have been constructed through civilising processes to camouflage our animalistic nature. For Bataille (1986:31) man moved past his uncivilised nature by working, by accepting his own mortality and by advancing from unabashed sexuality to sexuality with shame. This led to society establishing rules around appropriate sexual behaviour, governed by taboo, which then gave rise to eroticism.

Bataille (1986:31) argues that 'eroticism is the imbalance in which man[13] consciously calls his own existence into question'. Such eroticism is understood as pulling apart the organised and predetermined existence of the individual (Bolt-Irons 1995:234). From this it follows that eroticism always entails a deconstruction of accepted social values (Bataille 1986:18). It is therefore the transgressive nature of the erotic experience which causes a person to question his or her own existence and value systems (Bolt-Irons 1995:234). Eroticism often reveals the

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[12]Mntambo's previous work includes sculptural works made out of cow hide, which was molded to the shape of her body. In other words, Mntambo re-shaped a raw dead cow skin, to her own body. Placing a dead animal skin on your own body and then stretching it over yourself to take the shape of your own figure can be seen as grotesque and abject. From these works she has progressed into turning her own form into a bull by digital means.
[13]The term "man" is used here as this is how Freud and Bataille used it in their patriarchally oriented writings, however I find the use of the word sexist and therefore prefer to use the term "human" beings, as it refers to all human kind.

struggle between sexual expression and repression, which can be manifest in fetish objects (Mahon 2005:12). Mahon (2005:11) notes that eroticism can be a challenging and powerful tool in the visual arts, as it explores notions of sexual desire, arousal and carnal attraction, as well as the desire of the Other which we find repulsive (Mahon 2005:11).

Many issues are raised when viewing Mntambo's work. In *The rape of Europa* she references inappropriate sexual behaviour through the term 'rape', as well as through the suggestion of sexual activity between humans and animal. Her use of eroticism may be a simultaneous questioning of her and our existence as human beings; it may be a form of transgression, used to point out social concerns relating to body politics in South Africa; or the transformation of her own figure into a bull which then rapes an image of herself could be interpreted as an expression of her concerns relating to her own identity.

In *The rape of Europa* and *Narcissus,* the female form is depicted as both alluring and hairy, challenging conventional ideas of beauty and stereotypes around femininity, since in Western society, females are meant to have little body hair (Perryer 2005:[sp]). Both MacKenny (2001:102) and Kristeva (1982:3) concur that body hair provokes the sense of abjection, as it threatens the boundaries which separate humans from animals. Mahon (2007:137) argues that there are fetishist associations between fur and a women's sex, as well as erotic taboos around the female and the maternal breast. *The rape of Europa* and *Narcissus* embrace abject and erotic notions, the viewer is confronted with those fragile states that blur the boundary of what separates the human from the animal (Kristeva 1982:12). In Mntambo's work, the viewer finds him- or herself gazing at a manipulated fetishist female form, admiring abject qualities associated with female and the animal body (Kristeva 1982:3), hence participating in the transgression of traditional values placed on the body as desirable (Mahon 2005:11). Mntambo has turned herself into an erotic beast, which draws on and exploits many social constructs.

Apart from presenting the Other body as an eroticized abject, *The rape of Europa* and *Narcissus* can both be shown to engage in excess as they draw on multiple references, although dominated by a post-colonial reading. In *The rape of Europa* the contemporary black female body is presented against the colonial image of the black female body as animalistic, and reference is clearly made to violence, particularly in the form of rape. In accordance with McIntosh (2008:[sp]), Mntambo's work can be seen as an unusual investigation into relations of power. The referencing of traditional gender roles can be seen throughout art history with the male as hero - the conqueror - and female as victim. It seems as though these roles are being adapted in *The rape of Europa* as the female takes on both roles. The work questions whether gender

constructs such as these have been resolved, or whether male patriarchal dominance is still prevalent in South Africa's everyday society.

Another implication, this time in *Narcissus*, is the reference to society's ideals relating to bodily beauty aesthetics and how females tend to view their own bodies and self-worth. Here, Mntambo is staring at her own image in the water, the ideal female form stares back at her animal form. Mntambo refers to multiple connotations that are implied within these two works, which become excessive as the viewer begins to interpret and make sense of the art work.

As is typical of the Baroque, these works are overtly constructed, and their compositions centre on the actions of the figures, in particular the hybrid figure of the Zeus bull-man. The attention to detail is used to provoketactile associations and draw the viewer's attention. Like the Baroque, the narrative has been left open to interpretation, but has been reinterpreted by combining the traditional imagery with Mntambo's new naturalistic version, the adoption of new technology being a Neo-Baroque trait. Because the digital media have the ability to make the animal-figure look so natural, it is used to question reality and the constructs within society.

This work makes use of hybrid forms, as the Zeus bull-man has both human and animal qualities, as well as both male and female attributes. This is reinforced by the medium of photography, which is enhanced digitally. The fantastical nature of the work clearly reveals it to be a constructed image, yet this apparent overcoming of reality further enhances the effect and connotations within the work, creating spectacle and shock as it draws on the abject. The implication of multiple meanings and the socially transgressive connotations are used to trigger a reaction within the viewer, to make people aware of Mntambo's own concerns with society. In this way, Mntambo's work is situated within the Neo-Baroque genre, where she incorporates post-colonial ideals. Mntambo's work encourages a critique of feminine and body politics. In its presentation of the female body as monstrous, and its approach to body politics from a post-colonial angle, these works of Mntambo can be contextualised as belonging to the Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess.

After reviewing these works, it has becomes plausible that Mntambo has used the Neo-Baroque as an approach to discuss or deliver commentary on body politics in order to reveal her own concerns. It has moreover become clear that excess is achieved by using, among other elements, the abject and eroticism. Mntambo may use these to question social systems, or to act as a form of social resistance, or both. In questioning her own identity, a sense of identity crisis within herself may have been revealed in her work, or even just her own uncertainties about aspects of South African culture.

3.2.2 *Skinless II by Leora Farber*

Farber is a white female South African artist who works with themes relating to the body, particularly the actual living body as holding the potential for physical manipulation. Farber's work can be seen as a deconstruction of gender identity and patriarchal constructs of femininity. In *Skinless II* (2002) Farber comments on society's pressure on the female body to conform to a particular physical appearance according to the strict demands of current social trends. This includes the body that makes use of the medical industry as a means to achieve a state of beauty to be desired rather than to improve health, namely a person altering their own body appearance for the purpose of vanity (Farber 2003:[sp]). Farber's work can be seen as an investigation of the female body as a site of control and excess. According to Farber's artist's statement (2003:[sp]), the body, in all its beautiful and abject states, becomes the main focus in her work. Attributes of beauty or ugliness are most often not due to aesthetic but rather to social and political regulations (Eco 2007:12).

Skinless II (Figure 13), is an elaborate sculptural form of a female arm in pigment wax, into which the artist has incorporated found objects like lace, fabric and stainless steel medical equipment. Despite its seductive appearance, the work clearly references the abject, as the word 'skinless' in the title implies exposure, that the skin has been peeled away from a body part. The embedded objects cross over each other in ways that mimic the forms of the veins and muscles which lie beneath the surface of the skin. The light pink and brown tones used add to the impression of the abject, as the sculptural arm seems to be dismembered, as though it should be part of a human corpse, thus taking on a gruesome quality. Various objects have been used to construct the bodily form and provoke associations and connotations.

In this work, as in others by Farber, skin has become the site of control, similar to fabric that can be altered. The human skin is manipulated to obey the rules of dominant ideals. The use of women's clothing in the artwork, such as corsets and gloves, help to morph or blend the distinctions between interior and exterior (Smith 2002). The work becomes excessive as it draws on many connotations relating to the body and various social constructs, as well as the associations attached to the materials used to create the artwork. The corset, belt-like buckle, and surgical blades are all objects used to force or change a body into conforming to a specific desirable appearance, while the corsets, gloves, and lace may be seen as fetishist (Shelton 1995:32).

Figure 13: Leora Farber, Skinless ii, 2002
(Smith 2002).

Farber (2003: [sp]) considers her work as an interrogation of gender identity and Western constructs of female identity. She aims to deconstruct notions used to define bodily difference through binary opposition, and so promote a relation between genders based on equality, which ties the work to post-colonial concerns. Farber states (2003:[sp]) that her main intention is to re-contextualize issues of bodily control, while also placing them within a South African context. The main purpose of this work was to provoke the viewer into critically engaging with certain dominant ideologies concerning the body, and to question dominant society's ideals (Farber 2003:[sp]). Schmahmann (2004:49) notes that using one's own body to question and confront common constructs about female bodily perfection and the values which underline them is a frequent approach to body politics within the arts. It is also typical of postmodern forms of art, which emphasise the self within the work, and where self-reference and parody are used to comment on society.

It could be argued that this work, while showing strong ties with Neo-colonial ideals, demonstrates a number of Neo-Baroque aesthetics. These may be seen in the combination of the various materials and objects used to create the sculptural form. The manner in which Farber groups the various objects, in conjunction with the connotations and meanings associated with these objects, cause the work to become excessive, which supports a Neo-Baroque reading.

Skinless II also has an uncanny and abject quality as it strongly resembles a corpse's arm, as well as making use of everyday materials in contradictory ways. This gives the work a realistic

effect at first glance, suggesting the illusion created by dominant society about bodily ideals. The work affects the viewers, arousing a sense of shock as they are reminded of their corporeal bodies and their ultimate mortality. Following Kristeva's (1982:3) suggestion that the corpse and death refer to the abject within society, she also comments on the abject body as a social construct. Farber therefore turns the body, or part of the body, into an abject form. This approach to body politics as relating to the female form, comments on her own current social concerns.

The form and materials employ ideas of attraction and repulsion, which could be associated with feelings of abjection and eroticism. The viewer is immediately aware of the closeness of the art form to the shape of a body part. This is intended to stir a reaction of repulsion within the viewer and to emphasise the female body as corporeal rather than abject, damaged, or Other. The viewer interacts with the erotic form as Other, suggesting transgression. Here Farber is trying to expose the unyielding movement between binary opposites and the secret desire for the Other, which places the work within both the erotic and the abject. Mahon (2007:273) moreover notes that society has an extensive fascination with flesh and blood even though they find it disturbing. It could be said that Farber has deliberately played on this idea knowing that it would both fascinate and unsettle the viewer.

Both Farber and Mntambo have used notions of the abject and erotic in their art to contest issues concerning the female body, gender roles and identity within society, particularly in South Africa. In doing so, the works transgress social boundaries in an attempt to renegotiate social constructs surrounding the female body and black body. As a result, these works align with excess as used within the Neo-Baroque, namely to push social limits and boundaries in an attempt to renegotiate various constructs within society. It could be said that post-colonial concerns relating to identity and body politics are used here in combination with the Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess, also provoking questions around the abject and the monstrous.

3.2.3 *The weight of the media- the burden of reality and Ugly girl at the rugby by Steven Cohen*

Steven Cohen's performances are dependent on shock value, by drawing on aspects of the abject such asthe erotic. One way to achieve a response of outrage is to challenge the notions of what aspects of the body should be private and what should be public. The artist dresses himself up in beautiful female attire and then exposes his genitals, while at times publicly ejecting body fluid like urine. While cross-dressing alone is seen as an abject quality within society, Cohen

takes it further by exposing himself and subjecting the public to parts of his body considered personal, as well as to bodily functions.

According to Tim Edwards (1994:93) a combination of display and voyeurism is central to all public sexual activity. He (1994:93) also claims that gay men in particular are conflicted by their being publicly controlled through the lack of socially approved sexual behaviour and their need to show their closet sexuality publicly in heterosexual culture. However, the display of gay sexuality in public is seen as a strategy to confront and overturn certain ideals within dominant society concerning sexuality (Edwards 1994:94). Cohen's art performances clearly align with this understanding, as it could be argued that, by publicly displaying undesirable sexual and transgender traits within his work, the artist hopes to challenge dominant constructs relating to body politics (De Villiers 2008:27).

Figure 14: Steven Cohen, *The Weight of the Media - the Burden of Reality,* 2003. (Mackenny2004).

Cohen performed *The weight of the media- the burden of reality* (Figure 14) in New York's Times Square on New Year's Eve 2003. In this piece Cohen wore a classical ballet tutu while dancing in a shop window covered with posters of headlines from South African newspapers. Wearing leopard print high heels, he performed ballet poses. Cohen moved through the confined space in a deliberately awkward manner. During his performance Cohen paused to take out a pin holding up one of the posters, then knelt down before the crowd and ripped the skin on his arms (Mackenny 2004). He attached a large bundle of newspapers to his head and, straining his neck, attempted to carry them. Eventually giving in to the pressure of the weight, he placed the

bundle back on the floor, stripped naked and left the space (Mackenny 2004). It may be surmised that here Cohen is commenting on the human race, that we should feel burdened, even concerned by the disturbing events being headlined in the news, and he is questioning why society, even that outside South Africa, is not making an attempt to put an end to such misfortunate incidents, implying that this is a burden we all must carry.

The headline posters used for the performance were from the South African newspapers The *Mail and Guardian, The Sunday Times, The Sowetan,* and *The Citizen,* which have reputations of exposing the daily violence and strange happenings in South Africa. Cohen activated the headlines by juxtaposing his own white, male body – in a bizarre costume of a tutu, corset, makeup and a small Star of David suspended from his nose – to the context of the performance space. This juxtaposition created a collision of cultural connotations and meanings, and disclosed some unexpected yet definite similarities between his performance and the context of the surrounding streets (Mackenny2004), since the performance took place in Times Square New York, the epicentre of Western capitalism, the huge, flashing neon billboards promoting consumerism and material life contrasted strongly with his work, which referenced the grim realities of other countries (Mackenny 2004). The performance is uncanny, as it draws on unfore seen and conflicting references and ideas. Although unity may have been evident in the underlying theme of social concerns, his performance was left open to interpretation, and the narrative was probably experienced by the viewer as chaotic and fragmented, typical of the Baroque and Neo-baroque (Ndalianis 2005:15 & 84). According to Ndalianis (2005:25-33 & 84) both the Baroque and Neo-baroque make use of the Labyrinth as it allows for narratives, spaces and media to blend into one another creating complexity, open ended narratives and planned chaos.

This performance was less radical than much of his usual work, since the artist was restricted by rules and regulations laid down by the shop owners. This in itself implies that American society enforces its ideals upon themselves and other peoples, in this case with a subtle form of censorship. However, Cohen still managed to engage with the passers-by, drawing their attention to his shop window performance by making a spectacle of himself. The piece also required active engagement from the audience: the fact that they had to read the headlines – which would draw attention to a shocking reality - meant that audience members participated in the work. The viewers' disbelief at the sight of this freaky drag queen in a shop window reinforced the sense of shock. These were excessive as the male body masquerading in female attire performed ("acted out") the lived realities of South African. It should be considered that

Cohen's juxtaposition of this performance with the American shop displays comments on consumerist society.

I would argue here that *The weight of the media- the burden of reality* should be read according to Neo-Baroque aesthetics. The combination of materials used to create the installation space, namely the performance's contrast with the technologically contemporary location, is overloaded with connotations. The artist's use of spectacle, shock, and an abject prettification of masculine identity aligns with Neo-Baroque strategies of engaging its audience emotionally by using excess to disturb value systems. By revealing his anxiety around conditions in South African society, Cohen's intention was to compel the outside world to recognise other realities, a typically post-colonial ideal. In this way, Cohen may have been attempting to apply a Neo-Baroque approach to his post-colonial concerns, to create a site of resistance as a means to reconstruct the particular social limits associated with identity and body politics.

As is noted by Buci-Glucksmann (1994:23-24) the Baroque is a culture of spectacle which aims to arouse the senses and stir a reaction within the viewer. The Baroque culture creates spectacle by encouraging the mass population into participating through visual pleasure, much like how the contemporary world of consumerism advertises by means of spectacle. Debord (2005:112) argues that spectacle is part of everyday life and people working with any discipline relating to the visual constantly try to outdo one another, as their main aim is to make commodity an acceptable part of everyday life. Debord (2005:112) further argues that spectacle is the moment when commodity has infiltrated every aspect of social life. According to Debord (2005:111), not only is our relation to the commodity visible, but everything else becomes invisible. He (Debord2005:111) explains that, in this way, consumerism creates a sense of alienation and isolation within modern society which is masked by mass pleasure and consumption and acts as a contemporary form of religious illusion as well as fostering the implication of commodities as fetishes.

Buci-Glucksmann (1994:25) takes this argument further by saying that contemporary culture can be seen as the new culture industry of the Baroque era; absolutism in government and superficiality of everyday consumption create a passive mass audience. There is moreover a clear link between commodity fetishism and a colonialist paradigm. In this regard, San Juan (1998:8) comments that post-colonialism is merely a product of capitalism, which simply disguises the power of dominant ideologies and the dehumanising role of consumerism. It should be considered whether this is the case in South Africa.

In analysis, Cohen's performance in a New York shop window seems to reflect Debord's and Cohen's views on the influence consumerism has had on society and the sense of alienation it has created through globalisation. The newspapers, items of clothing and surrounding space all reference consumer society. Cohen reveals societies' ignorance of issues surrounding us in our everyday lives and, as is typical of the Baroque, he aims to mobilise the human senses through spectacle and shock (De Villiers 2008:9).

Cohen's performances almost always transgress the norms of gender constructs while highlighting the violence confronting many homosexual people in their everyday lives. The artist first and most obviously undermines heterosexual codes of masculinity through the use of drag clothing in his performances (Du Plessis [sa]:21). He draws attention to the taboos that structure the representation of the sexualized body. By making public what is considered private aspects and functions of the body he threatens the masculine and in doing so makes the male body vulnerable (Du Plessis [sa]:38). This can be seen in works such as *Ugly girl at the rugby*(Figure 15) at the Loftus Versveld rugby stadium in Pretoria in 1998, where his performance actively imposed an encounter with dominant masculine rugby supporters in their own space (Blignaut 2003:40). This work reveals how masculinity and homosexuality often forcefully clash, highlighting the abuse Cohen regularly suffers as a homosexual male in society (De Villiers 2008:28).

In this performance, Cohen wore high heeled fetish shoes, stockings, a corset, and a tutu, while exposing his penis, at the same time revealing his masculine hairy torso, deliberately presenting himself as man in woman's clothing. These clothing items when worn by women are often considered to be erotic. Here, Cohen liberated himself from the prescriptions of patriarchal society, subverting the social values prescribed to gender, and revealing oppressive social constructs (Du Plessis [sa]:27). During the performance the public reacted aggressively towards Cohen, verbally abusing him and just generally showing homophobic behaviour. According to Du Plessis ([sa]:28) the mainstream dominant heterosexual man feels the need to punish other men for revealing any form of feminine display or behaviour Kristeva maintains that this type of response is typical as society tries to reinforce stereotypical notions of social behaviour without attempting to explore the issues that the artist is presenting to them (Mackenny 2001:101).

Figure 15: Steven Cohen, *Ugly girl at the rugby*. 1998.
(Steven Cohen artist [Sa]).

Cohen's presence and behaviour were bizarre in this social context, and so drew on multiple connotations. He makes use of visual as well as tactile associations through the fetishist materials which combine to make his outfit. The composition becomes completely dependent on his actions, with the focus on the viewer's position in relation to Cohen. As in the Times Square performance, this work comes across as unplanned and directionless, with an open narrative, leaving the viewer to try to interpret it.

Cohen's work moreover links with post-colonialism concerns as he challenges the boundaries surrounding identity and body politics in South Africa that were originally established during colonial times, and carried through to its post-colonial and post-Apartheid era. During the colonial and Apartheid eras, homosexuality was not deemed acceptable within society as there was an emphasis on male patriarchal values (Van der Watt (sa):104&Sassen2003:11). It must be noted (Sassen2003:11) that Jewish people were excluded from aspects of society in Apartheid South Africa. Against this background, Cohen embraces aspects of abjection associated with both his homosexual and his Jewish body, forcing people to acknowledge these constructs within society in order to renegotiate the social limits, not only between heterosexuality and homosexuality (Du Plessis [sa]:33& De Villiers 2008:27), but also between Christian and Judaic. Cohen's work hence embodies the abject as it threatens dominant social systems. Cohen breaks the boundaries of what is deemed accepted behaviour in society; he incites shock, horror, and disgust in his audience (MacKenny 2001:102). The viewer is jolted to activate the possible

effect of acknowledging notions about sexual politics and body politics, as the artist expresses his right to self-expression as a South African artist (MacKenny 2001:103). Previously, during the Apartheid era such expressions of homosexuality as cross-dressing were not tolerated by South African society, regulated by draconian anti-homosexual laws (Sassen2003:11). Even today such behaviour is still not fully accepted in dominant centres and subtle anti-Semitism is rife. These are issues that Cohen is clearly attempting to demonstrate. He forces dominant society to recognise his homosexual body, as he inserts himself into dominant society's space.

The artist's conflict with dominant norms and his subsequent behaviour aimed at subverting such constructs plays out in these over-dramatised performances as he makes a spectacle of himself (De Villiers 2008:18). There is seemingly no place for any subtlety in such subversive acts: Cohen dresses up in fetish items of clothing like corsets, platform shoes, leopard print fabrics and fluffy textured accessories, all of which can be interpreted as erotic. The fact that he then juxtaposes such eroticized drag-queen attire with abject elements like his exposed penis become part of a process of layering that add to the complexity of his performances. According to Richardson (2010:79), the feminising of the male body is an appropriate way to question masculine constructs. Bataille (1986:18 & 256) maintains that eroticism is being used thus to demonstrate its ability to arouse inner conflict within a person by interrogating their values, in order to challenge acceptable social behaviour as prescribed by dominant social systems, which form the basic structure of our existence as individuals. Eroticism is being used as a tool to defy social boundaries in an effort to question people's notions on sexuality, and create a form of resistance against dominant constructs (Mahon 2005:14). Cohen clearly defies such established orders, by not only exposing his penis, but also by not complying with conventional gender appearance and behaviour. It could be said that Cohen is trying to break down established patterns which prescribe gender and sexual roles within society.

Both feminist and post-colonial discourses try to reinstate the marginalised as a way of actively resisting dominant social constructs (Ashcroft *et al* 1995:249). Tiffin (2005:98) points out that post-colonial counter-discourse approaches include the investigation of dominant discourses, by understanding and then revealing the hidden inscriptions within such discourse and then deconstructing these notions from a cross-cultural point of view. This can be seen in Cohen's work as he deliberately reveals undesirable notions about the homosexual and trans-sexual body, revealing these assumptions in hopes of reconstructing ideas about the homosexual body. Cohen purposefully exposes and plays on dominant society's concerns or constructs about the homosexual body, by performing the work in spaces which are centres of dominant constructs, such as The Loftus Versfeld Rugby Stadium in conservative Pretoria. Cohen maximises the

possible effect of outrage and shock it would have. In this way, he makes a spectacle of himself by placing his undesirable and marginalised body in public to be viewed by those that find it unacceptable, as a form of resistance and in hopes of renegotiating the homosexual body's place within society.

The artists discussed so far have incorporated eroticism within their work together with the abject to create a reaction within the viewers, to make them question their own ideals and societal boundaries. This strategy used by the artists is aimed at reconstructing cultural norms relating to the body and sexuality, by pushing on the boundaries and exceeding the limits. The pushing of societal boundaries and the breaking of limits is a form of excess which remains central to the Neo-Baroque aesthetic (Ndalianis 2004:[sp] &Calabrese 1992:59). The Neo-Baroque, themes of sexuality and erotic excess are moreover seen as appropriate means of querying and agitating moral systems within society(Calabrese 1992:59). This approach can be regarded as parallel with post-colonial approaches which use sexuality and eroticism as a means to unsettle dominant ideals about undesirable bodies within society.

Ashcroft (2001:19) explains that the adaptation of subject matter as well as forcing access into different systems of social dominance have typically been used as a characteristic of resistance. This can be seen particularly in the works of Cohen and Hlobo, where in their work, they impose their homosexual bodies onto South African society as a destabilising mechanism to help transform culture and reconstruct notions surrounding the body. Cultural identity is evidently not a static essence at all, but rather a point of view that constantly changes (Ashcroft 2001:4), so affording these artists the opportunity to renegotiate body politics.

3.2.4 *Izithunz and Umtshotsho by Nicholas Hlobo*

Izithunz (Figure 16) (2009) forms part of Hlobo's *Umtshotsho* exhibition at the Michael Stevenson Gallery. It is a sculptural installation made from Hlobo's signature rubber inner tubing, that is from tyres manipulated and stitched into the desired form. In this work, Hlobo combines the various forms of rubber with other often contrasting materials like rubber, ribbon, lace, and organza, along with found objects which he alters, in this work a couch, carpet and lamp. Here, the reupholstered rubber table lamp casts a red glow on the group of figures (Nicholas Hlobo Umtshotsho 2009:[sp]). The installation is set in a darkened room and made up of eight figures which take on a jellyfish or ghost-like form. Lighting is positioned to draw attention to specific parts of the installation. Some of the figures are seated on a couch while others are free-standing or suspended from the ceiling. These figures are created primarily from

the inner rubber tubing of tyres, although each figure is individualisedby different details of lace, ribbon, and organza, which Hlobo has stitched into the rubber.

Figure 16: *Izithunz*, Nicholas Hlobo, 2009.
Courtesy of Michael Stevenson Gallery.
(Nicholas Hlobo Umtshotsho 2009:[sp]).

In most of his works Hlobo generally draws on his Xhosa heritage by making use of the Xhosa language and exploring how traditions have evolved in modern times. It has been noted (Ashcroft 2001:2) how the use of indigenous knowledge is a common post-colonial strategy exploited to assert oneself into dominant language systems in an attempt to recover aspects of authentic pre-colonial cultural reality. The authenticity of his use of Xhosa adds another layer of meaning to the artwork, and another aspect to the artist's identity. In this way, South African artists like Hlobo are reconstructing themselves through the use of their own language, previously denied to them during the Apartheid era (Oguibe1999:19).

Hlobo, like Cohen, is using notions of abjection in his work through references to homosexuality (Perryer 2005:[sp]). According to Kristeva (1982:65) this construct is a way of justifying the exclusion and rejection of homosexuals as they transgress 'normally sanctioned sexual behaviour and by penetrating the body's anus, transgress bodily boundaries, establishing them as Other (Kristeva 1982:6). Anal sex is a perversion according to cultural teachings, which should trigger disgust (Freud 1953:152). As a black homosexual Hlobo is seen as Other and abject, not only by the dominant heterosexual culture, but also by his own Xhosa community (Doy 2000:160). It should be noted further that the homosexual body has been associated with HIV/AIDS, and so considered deviant and abject as this disease disrupts body boundaries (Butler 1956:375). Crimp (2005:148) emphasises the fact that AIDS is a central issue for gay men. Due to the constructs of dominant society that both the homosexual body and the black body are deemed a site of disease, Hlobo's use of such content could be seen as an attempt to

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expose these mind-sets in the hope of alleviating marginalisation of and discrimination towards black homosexuals within their own communities.

The clear tension found between heterosexuality and homosexuality, as well as between traditional (African) and global concerns relating to homosexuality and AIDS is explored in Hlobo's work, expressed in part through the combination of the decorative handcraft stitching associated with the feminine and the tyre which is associated with the masculine, blurring the boundaries between genders (Van der Vlist 2007:67). This gender fusion allows the work to become sexually non-specific, ambiguous, and so abject, as it blurs the boundaries between female and male, as noted by Kristeva (1982:9).

This work embraces the abject further in its attempts to transgress sexual boundaries, as it deals with the erotic in its use of materials, and in doing so creates excess (Kristeva 1982:15). Eroticism is used here as a tool for resistance reflecting the desire to change a condition in society. From this discussion it could be said that Hlobo's use of eroticism reflects a form of resistance against society's and his own culture's view that homosexuality is an unacceptable form of sexuality.

Figure 17:*Umtshotsho*, Nicholas Hlobo, 2009.
Courtesy of Michael Stevenson Gallery.
(Nicholas Hlobo Umtshotsho 2009:[sp]).

Umtshotsho is another installation art piece (Figure 17) featuring inner tyre tubes manipulated with coloured ribbons and lace. The work forms part of *Izithunz,* representing the traditional Xhosa rituals that accompany the transition from youth to adulthood and how these rituals have changed. The term '*Umtshotsho*' refers to a traditional party for young people. According to Hlobo (Nicholas Hlobo Umtshotsho 2009:[sp]) "The focus is on that time when children are

beginning to think and act like adults; the desire to explore life, dating, going out at night and all the consequences of wanting to do things older people do". Hlobo further explains that this tradition hardly takes place anymore in its old form. Young people have found new alternatives instead, such as spending time at bars and nightspots. One of Hlobo's aims is to reveal how times have changed and traditional rituals are slowly falling away (Nicholas Hlobo Umtshotsho 2009:[sp]).Simbao (2011:[sp])also notes that this work is a representation of a traditional Xhosa ritual or youth social gathering that promotes teenage boys and girls to safely investigate their curiosity around adulthood by 'acting out a ritual of love and war'. This tradition involves performances of stick fighting and non-penetrative 'thigh-sex' known as *ukusoma* (Simbao 2011:[sp]). Hlobo himself has however apparently not experienced this ritual, but is aware ofit; it is a tradition moreover, which does not readily accept homosexuality (Simbao 2011:[sp]). In his interview with Simbao (2011:[sp]), Hlobo says that the work is also about the masks and performance people put on when at social gatherings. This could imply that Hlobo feels a need to mask his homosexuality when in public, that he is concerned about rejection or being discriminated against due to his sexuality, revealing that tensions about homosexuality still exist amongst some cultures.

Hlobo's work can be seen to form part of post-colonial discourse as he uses the body to disturb colonial body constructs while engaging with gender and sexual politics to overcome oppression. Hlobo's act of sewing together various materials becomes a symbol throughout his work for joining histories and merging opposites, which draw on his experiences in post-Apartheid South Africa (O'Toole 2008). The pink and red ribbons have their own connotations, suggesting homosexuality and a red ribbon is also used as a symbol for AIDS. The colour pink and the act of sewing are socially aligned with the feminine. The tyre tubes have visual similarities to human intestines, linking to anal sex (Perrier 2005:[sp]). The pink ribbon can be seen as a camp[14]or homosexual symbol, as well as becoming erotic when juxtaposed with black rubber, which has strong fetishist ties associated with sadomasochism (Steele 1996:157). According to Kristeva (MacKenny 2001:102) inner body references can be seen as abject as they threaten the body's inner and outer boundaries.

Eco (2007:416) believes that elements of camp can be traced back to the Baroque period and it has become a permanent form of the recent Neo-Baroque aesthetic. He (Eco 2007:416) further explains that the subject must feature exaggeration or the marginal, as well as a certain degree of vulgarity, to be considered camp. Such camp is moreover most often drawn to sexual

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[14]Camp is a style or form of aesthetic, used to draw attention to the artifice of gender system through exaggeration, parody and juxtaposition according to Bergman (1993:12). Camp is also known to describe elements in a person or situation that express a gay sensibility (Bergman 1993:20).

ambiguity(Eco 2007:416). This can be seen in Hlobo, Cohen and Mntambo's work, as each artist plays on gender, sexual ambiguity, and the marginal, all considered abject, whereas bodies that are seen as in between or ambiguous are not socially accepted (Richardson 2010:49). Cohen purposely uses exaggeration in his work as a means to allude to the crude, pushing on the social boundaries which police the body. In this way his work becomes excessive as the ambiguous sexuality and gender transgress social limits. It would seem as if excess established through the abject and eroticism can be used as a form of resistance to contest issues relating to body politics.

Leather and rubber are seen as fetishist attire as they resemble a second skin, and also have strong sadomasochistic associations. Shelton (1995:30) explains that the leather skin creates a being which is culturally ungendered. Hlobo's use of black rubber holds these same associations of sadomasochism and ambiguous sexuality, as seen in many of his works, such as *Umtshotsho* (figure17) and *Izithunz* (figure16) (Nicholas Hobo Izele2006). Hlobo stitches many of his artworks which, according to Baudrillard (Shelton 1995:32),is a sign used for the site for fetish substitution. The stitching becomes evidence of Hlobo's touch on the rubber skin-like surface whichserves as a joining, as well as having a decorative function, and also refers to tactile associations (Jacobs 2008). Hlobo's stitching makes ridges that create tension between the rubber and the stitched ribbon, which encourages the viewer to touch the artworks. The method of stitching into the leather with ribbon has a tactile similarity to a human wound in which the skin has been stitched up. In his artwork Hlobo clearly explores his own sexuality through the fetishist use of materials as well as in the figuration of forms ,revealing his own desires and sexual preferences as a means of addressing differences and 'normal' cultural stereotypes (Perryer 2005:[sp]). The tactility of his materials and his ability to engage with connotation, are complementary skills and bring the viewer into a more open conversation around body politics (Jacobs 2008). The ability to arouse visual as well as tactile sensations is typical of both the Baroque and Neo-Baroque.

Camp is a form of aesthetic used by Hlobo and Cohen to demonstrate gender as performance and draw attention to the artifice of the gender system. Camp often evokes analogies of inside and outside, as can clearly be seen in the work of these two artists, where reference to inside bodily functions and external body are often made, therefore embracing abject elements within his work. As noted by Bergman (1993:11), a camp aesthetic in art can be a useful element to destabilise heterosexual values of normality. Both artists make use of Neo-Baroque aesthetics together with notions of the abject in their approach to body politics. Hence it can be concluded that both Hlobo and Cohen have taken a Neo-Baroque approach of excess in conjunction with

the abject and erotic as means to approach issues relating to their sexuality and bodies, as a form of resistance to the heterosexual norm.

Hlobo's work clearly reveals tensions on more than one level: between the freedom of artistic expression and sexual freedom; the anxieties and ambitions of society are used to reveal constructs about the sexualised body, particularly the homosexual body. By deliberately playing on social tensions relating to sexuality as an approach within art, various forms of erotic art cause society to look at itself from an alternative position (Mahon 2005:37). Tension is created by challenging social limits relating to the body and sexuality.

Calabrese (1992:59) notes that excess is usually created when working with themes of sexuality and eroticism, a common tactic used by Neo-Baroque artists to overcome current social constraints. Fetishist forms and elements are incorporated within the work of some South African artists, as a means of arousing erotic associations. At the same time the restraints placed by society on human sexual desires, and bodies constructed as abject and taboo, are questioned. According to Mahon (2007:283), eroticism is employed by artists as a surprising way to disturb the viewer's psychological and ideological views, making the viewer question his or her own beliefs and moral values. In this way erotic art can be used as an approach in the search for equality between people of the opposite sex, race, and sexuality (Mahon 2005:15). This approach has been explored by post-colonial artists as a means of addressing issues of identity. However, within a Neo-Baroque context, this could be an appropriate means to further accentuate excess and resist social limitations.

Bataille (2010:96) maintains that excess is at the core of desire, arguing that excess is the combination of 'horror and joy', evident in both Cohen's and Mntambo's work. Freud (1953:238) situates art in relation to desire, not only in relation to the artist's desire, but also in relation to the spectator's desire. The viewer recognises the desire of the artist represented in the artwork as his own repressed desires. This desire could arise from any aspect of the artwork, whether it is in the form or imagery, or found in the erotic associations or fetishist elements within the work which could stimulate pleasure within the viewer's unconscious (Owen 1993:58). According to this interpretation, excess and the erotic are closely linked, as erotic and fetishist associations, materials, or themes most often give rise to excess.

Causing the viewer to desire something which society has valued as undesirable could be seen as an appropriate method of making the viewer question his or her own social values. By making undesirable bodies seem desirable could be considered a form of resistance to dominant social ideals, constructs and beliefs about the body, becoming a way of generating awareness in

the viewer of such prejudices within society, as is evident in the work of Hlobo, Cohen and Mntambo.

3.2.5 *Lolita by Tracey Rose*

Rose makes use of new media and new approaches to the creation of art (Bedford 2003:5). Rose, like Cohen, highlights the importance of performance in art through parody. As a video and performance artist, Rose has created a variety of characters and personas to demonstrate her views on body politics within a South African context (Spring 2008:273). Diprose (1991:162) explains that the use of the body as an aesthetic material allows artists to create 'them self' within their art, and so recreate themselves differently without reference to approved bodily ideals, domination or the exclusion of the Other.

Figure 18: *Lolita*, Tracey Rose, 2001.
(Bedford 2004:105).

In works like *Lolita* (Figure 18), Rose places herself at the centre of her art in an act of parody, introducing the importance of acting as part of the performative in the production of art and the reconstruction of one's cultural, social and historical identity. The presentation of different versions of the self encourages self-exploration and invention for both the artist and the viewer (Brielmier 2006:31). Breitz (2002:90) moreover notes that the work moves between photographic narration and performance recording. The use of narrative in which the composition is dependent on a single figure's actions can be seen as Baroque.

The work is an image of Rose dressed up in a doll-like manner with plaited red hair and a painted white face, the eyes open and staring. Her frilly dress has big bows, and she wears lacy

socks with crimson Mary-Jane shoes. The slight breeze reveals her white cotton panties, which references the popular image of Marilyn Monroe with her dress blowing up. Rose resembles a nightmarish rag-doll with a candy cane in her mouth (Murray 2002:90), posed sexily on the bonnet of a shiny red fire truck, a pose often used by female models (Breitz 2002:90).

Rose makes a spectacle of herself by masquerading her coloured female body as an overly dramatic white doll, which is deliberately aimed at mocking and shocking dominant western culture. Rose may be commenting here that Western society has constructed the female body to be beautiful and lady-like in both attire and behaviour, since in the past women wore similar but longer dresses. Rose's dress in my opinion resembles the clothing that little girls use to dress their pale-skinned porcelain dolls, in Breitz's (2002:90) opinion Rose is dressed like a rag-doll. Previously, dolls have been seen as a means to teach little girls how to behave and dress. By turning herself into a life-sized doll, Rose appears to be mocking these views, as she does not want to conform to social constructs of the ideal female. Bedford (2003:5) argues that Rose highlights pre-conceptions about women and their bodies.

The work becomes excessive in exceeding cultural boundaries relating to the body, which is used here to resist systems of classification. To these ends, she has situated her coloured body in a pose and role previously reserved for a white female. The use of white powder and wigs is used as a means of overturning centuries of visual iconography and cultural authority (Jones 2003:23), by deliberately mocking the Western idea of the idealised woman. Taking on both an abject and erotic undertone by contrasting the sexy pose with the grotesquely painted face, Rose's image deliberately conflicts with racial stereotypes about which bodies are deemed desirable and which are not. In doing so, Rose pushes on social boundaries of racial and gender classification. By going beyond social limits and casting doubt on current values, excess is created which is typical of the Neo-Baroque (Calabrese 1992:59).

Santa (2000:[sp])notes that the title, *Lolita,*is a girl's name after the title of a novel written by Vladimir Nabakov[15](1955). This has become a demeaning term used to describe a young girl with a precocious sexual drive. Rose's little girl clothing and doll-like appearance could be referring to Nabokov's book(Santa 2000:[sp]). The way in which Rose has evoked a little girl in a blatantly suggestive pose has an abject quality due to its socially inappropriate sexual nature.

The figure openly stares back at the viewer, challenging and reversing the gaze (Neidhardt 2006). Viewers might find themselves in an uncomfortable position, as the female figure

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[15]Nabokov's *Lolita* tells of a middle-aged man who becomes obsessed with a twelve-year old girl whom he privately nicknames Lolita. The man attempts to molest the girl, but she in turn seduces him and they develop a sexual relationship. Since then Kubrick (1962) and Lynne (1997) have made films based on the book (Santa 2000:[sp]).

subjects them to her own gaze, deflecting erotic, abject, and fetish roles. However, the female body being used in this image is contradictory: it is made to appear abject and undesirable by the garish face paint, yet by contrast, the sexy pose, short skirt, and bare female legs referencean acceptably mainstream sexually desirable image, revealing social constructs surrounding the female and coloured body. Rose therefore situates the female body in an ambiguous position while clearly retaining erotic elements. This *Lolita* is not the traditional fetish object to be desired. Desire is a social product, which we experience within our everyday lives as we interact with one another. Desire is considered a lack (Freud 1930:19), which,according to Jones (1993:59),the artist represents and the viewer relates to. Here desire is "embodied in the image which is equated with women who are reduced to the body, which in turn is seen as the site of sexuality and the locus of desire" (Schor1993:73). In this context, the female body becomes a fetish object which represents sexual desire, making fetishist elements a suitable area to explore in erotic art which is intent upon confronting body politics.

Rose deliberately challenges constructs relating to the desirable body by giving her work an abject and excessive undertone, ultimately questioning what society deems desirable and undesirable. This photo aims to change cultural meanings that represent, restrict and prejudice females by raising a political agenda which is not spoken about. Due to the transgressive nature of Rose's image, it can be said that she employs aspects of abjection and eroticism in her work through the use of a confrontational gaze; and that she may be resisting traditional values which deem a body desirable. Could it be that Rose is commenting on how society teaches girls from a young age to conform to such ideals relating to the ideal body?

Rose's work can be seen as post-colonial as she contests gendered, racial and sexual identities within her work. Schmahmann (2004:49) explains that our sexual identities and bodies are usually defined with favouritism towards physical appearance and the expression of sexual desire is only allowed to be expressed in a socially acceptable form. According to Ashcroft *et al* (1995:321), the body is a central aspect of post-colonialism, as the body is used within society to reveal all the 'visible' signs of difference. This includes the various forms of cultural and social inscriptions placed on the body during dominant colonial discourses, which often go unnoticed by dominant society today. It is in this respect that Rose's work can be seen as post-colonial as she exposes the politics of difference, particularly race and gender. In this case, she exploits particular body constructs presented by society as 'normal', by exposing their constructed nature as well as that such ideals relating to the ideal body are actually unnatural.

It can be said that there is an element of absurdity in the carnivalesque, overly-constructed image of *Lolita*, not only in the context in which she is placed, but also in her outfit, pose and

makeup, which has made her monstrous. Rose's *Lolita* challenges constructs about the coloured female body within South Africa which were established during the colonial and Apartheid era. She attempts to make viewers aware that these notions of bodily difference, inscribed within society, were used in the past to disadvantage the coloured body. Murray (2002:59) explains that artists like Rose examine the restrictions which were used to define their bodies, and visually express these constructs which have been carried through from colonial times. The coloured body was previously seen as undesirable as it came about because of the mixing of races. During the Apartheid era, sexual relations between the European and African races were seen as unacceptable and deviant behaviour, and so the coloured body became a sign of shame and immoral activity within the Apartheid era. According to Oguibe (1999:19), the 'Other' tries to claim his body and reconstruct it from the Western colonial perspective and discourses of power.

The context in which Rose as *Lolita* is placed should be taken into consideration. Her sexy pose on the top of a fire engine's large bonnet draws on images from popular visual culture where beautiful female models (usually white) pose in this way, and where both the car and the female become objects of desire. In this case, despite the pose with legs suggestively spread and dress flaring up, Rose's face paint draws on the grotesque, which creates a contradiction. It could be that Rose is mocking dominant cultures' ideals and perspectives of the ideal female body; and Richardson (2010:5) explains that representations which eroticise the Other are used to challenge dominant ideals of beauty and eroticism, which may be the case in this work. It is worth considering whether Rose is trying to get answers to her own identity issues by using her own body to contest ideals relating to the female body.

It can also be said that her work is Neo-Baroque, as it is excessive in exceeding social boundaries as a means of renegotiating constructs about the body, especially in its approach towards the traditional understanding of the coloured female body. The use of digital media in conjunction with performance creates a sense of illusion within reality as a means of revealing prejudice constructs within everyday society, a Neo-Baroque approach to addressing social concerns. The use of spectacle to create shock aligns with Neo-Baroque aesthetics; and the multiple reference and connotations associated with the imagery contribute to the excess. Rose moreover uses Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess in combination with the abject, the erotic, and even spectacle as means to approach body politics and create a response of shock within the viewer. It seems that Rose is applying post-colonial ideals to a Neo-Baroque approach of excess in the way she reveals herself.

3.3 Conclusion

Through the analysis of South African artworks, this chapter has demonstrated an alternative approach to body politics. The artists use bizarre and abject inferences within their work to disturb the viewer. Such an approach draws on similarities to the Baroque, as Eco (2007:169) describes the Baroque period as having a fascination for those things which provoke speculation in the viewer. He (Eco 2007:169) explains that, during this era's cultural climate, artists investigated subjects relating to violence, death, and horror, all of which can be seen to align with the abject (Kristeva 1982:45). It is noted that the artists discussed take a similar approach, by exciting the viewers' curiosity and then creating unease in them through the presentation of the abject once the spectators realise what is being represented to them.

In Farber's work, the confrontation of death is presented as an element of the abject, whereas Cohen's and Hlobo's presentation of homosexuality remain unacceptable within a normative context. In the case of Mntambo, the implication of rape and the close association between human and animal signify an uncomfortable reference to bestiality; while Rose manipulates sexual desire to arouse the viewer's interest, and then reveals the abject in the way she has painted her face, which is almost characteristic of a horror movie. These artists have all used their sexual identity and their bodies to implicate abjection, which they exploit as a means of addressing body politics in a post-colonial South Africa.

In the works of Mntambo, Hlobo, Farber, Cohen and Rose, discussed thus far, the abject is rendered to renegotiate identity within South Africa. Through the analysis of their work, it can be seen how the black, female, and homosexual bodies have come to represent the abject, and how these artists embrace this within their work as a means of making society aware of their concerns as individuals. These artists use the abject as an approach to body politics, which they feel need to be addressed. They shock people out of the comfort zones constructed for them by dominant society, and make them aware of constructs which promote inequality still present within society. Pinho (2006:10) states that the reconstruction of the body through self-creation could lead to the reproduction of how the social body is represented within society, thereby alleviating oppression of the marginalized body. In this manner, by positioning themselves as marginal, the artists imply that art is a valuable resource for those who try to expose and investigate how society is still ordered and regulated by dominant social systems (Cohen, Hancock &Tyler 2006:110). Schmahmann (2004:7) explains that South African, female artists in particular, are looking for ways of allowing their self-representations to emphasise that they are individuals capable of speaking for themselves.

Ashcroft (2001:20) explains that post-colonial societies which are in a process of change reveal a form of resistance which develops as a refusal to be absorbed into dominant culture. Such

societies choose to rather engage with that which is resisted in a different way, by taking the variety of influences exerted on them and altering them as a means of expressing their identity. He (Ashcroft 2001:20) notes that this form of resistance, known as post-colonial transformation, has been the most powerful and active form of resistance in colonised societies, as it has been continuous and central to the imaginations of these societies. The artists discussed so far reveal a resistance that evidently refuses to accept dominant social values. They take a wide variety of influences, exerted on them by dominant culture, that have been brought through from colonial times, and then change them into tools used to express a sense of identity and cultural being. Ashcroft (2001:21) maintains that difference, which contests domination through the transformative capabilities of the artists' own creativity, will eventually progress beyond these contested constructs. This has become evident in the discussed artworks, as the artists refer to various aspects of different cultures, often mixing their own heritage or values with dominant constructs established by the west during colonial times. Hlobo's work is a particularly good example as he makes reference to Xhosa traditions and language within a contemporary context. Cohen, on the other hand, draws on a complex mixture of references including Jewish, gender, and homosexual connotations, which are placed amidst contemporary references and Western constructs.

Alexander (2010:28) points out that signs of an identity crisis have become evident in South Africa, mainly due to political and social circumstances. Du Preez (2010:6) goes on to say that social democracy within South Africa is slowly being distorted into an system of greed and power, as seen by the corruption scandals within the government and ruling political party. According to Alexander (2010:27),conditions of social inequality still exist, which appears to underpin the concerns of some South African artists, who seem to feel uncertain or insecure about the current social and political conditions. Such conditions within a country could understandably create a sense of crisis amongst its people. Callaway (1994:232) states that contemporary Baroque demonstrates a strange edginess which highlights social unease and doubts. This is evident in the artworks discussed, where artists are displaying anxiety about current social conditions. There is a sense of disquiet within the work, used to unsettle the viewer, mostly through abject associations. However, this could be seen as signs of an emerging social crisis or an identity crisis within the artist. De Villiers (2008:8) explains that artists use performance as a way of resolving their own personal crises.

The breaking of boundaries and the need to question societal norms about the body reflects a concern by artists about the current state of society in South Africa; however, it is not exclusive to South Africa. The implication is that these artists feel a sense of social crisis and a desire to

help generate change within South African culture, and they are turning to the Neo-Baroque to find ways to express their dissatisfaction, in a climate similar to the seventeenth century Baroque period. Their adaptation of post-colonial ideals to Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess is used as a means of stirring a reaction within the viewer about body politics. These artists are incorporating the postmodern and post-colonial ideal of the self, as they use the body to reconstruct the individual, in the process contesting body constructs. In the artworks discussed, this sense of self-analysis to express social concerns has been applied to a Neo-Baroque aesthetic rather than adopting the minimalist postmodern approach. The Baroque artists too expressed social concerns through narratives derived from culture and religion, as can be seen in Mntambo's work. Because of the particular circumstances within which artists function, South African Neo-Baroque appears to be a unique blend of styles adapted by some artists.

What remains to be determined is whether the incorporation of these concerns with Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess is a more appropriate method of addressing body politics within South Africa than are post-colonial discourses. San Juan's (1998:8) view that post-colonial discourse only masks the power of dominant ideologies and the influences of consumer society, and so reproduces social inequalities becomes worth taking into consideration. The fact that artists still question marginalities and unequal power relations within the body politic makes it worthwhile considering whether consumerism faked the idea of progress while camouflaging previous dominant ideals. The visual examples discussed are clear indicators that many dominant ideals relating to gender, race and sexuality still continue to be silently enforced on South African society.

According to Ashcroft *et al* (1995:2) post-colonial theory can be seen to reproduce unequal economic and cultural relations. These masked inequalities motivate South African artists to turn to Neo-Baroque aesthetics as a means of resolving these concerns by making society aware of the reality of our everyday lives in South Africa. Some artists choose to challenge the sexual and gender systems embedded within the colonial and Apartheid eras, with the intention of establishing spaces in which people are able to express themselves openly. These artists have mostly used their own bodies as a means of addressing their concerns relating to body politics ;they often openly challenge and even resist dominant constructs. They seem to be looking for new ways to express these concerns. As has been demonstrated, these South African artists turned to the Neo-Baroque as an alternative approach to the post-colonial methods previously used.

The use of excess becomes instrumental, often in combination with the abject and erotic, as a shock tactic to raise society's awareness around these issues. This is evident in the erotic associations in Rose's work, whilst the abject arises from both references to *Lolita* and her garish face paint, all exploited to transgress social boundaries and establish excess to disturb the viewer. In the work of Cohen and Hlobo, eroticism can be found in their use of fetishist materials, and the context in which these materials are placed, which challenges social norms. Both the abject as well as excess ascend from not only the transgression of these social limits but from inferential signs. Mntambo creates erotic associations through the intimation of sexual intimacy and the transgression of socially accepted behaviour. The abject arises from this transgression between human and animal, which disturbs social boundaries and creates the context within which excess can be found. Thus a Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess is located not only in multiple inferences and references, but also through abject and erotic associations.

It has become evident that Neo-Baroque stylistic characteristics are emerging, which could quite possibly be a result of the current social, economic and political circumstances within South Africa. These artists reveal a form of resistance to current body politics by way of shocking their audience into awareness of their concerns. They incorporate post-colonial theories relating to the abject, the gaze, eroticism, and body politics as a form of commentary. Similar to the Baroque, the Neo-Baroque could be seen as having risen from turbulent socio-political circumstances: locally, current circumstances and inequalities, are causing South Africans to lose faith in the idea of social democracy, which results in a sense of crisis. The Neo-Baroque, having at its core the aim to arouse a response from the viewer hence seems an apt alternative artistic approach for artists intent on challenging the viewer's perceptions (De Villiers 2008:17).

These works challenge various boundaries relating to social values, as well as exceeding the limits of their surrounding space, so forcing the viewer to interact with the artwork. These artists are moreover using Baroque characteristics in combination with dominant discourses of post-colonialism to create a context for cultural resistance through a complex mixture of references which become hybrid within the artworks. The use of new digital media in conjunction with traditional media and spectacle with multiple references and layers of meaning underlining the works, further emphasise excess, as will be elucidated upon in the next chapter.

The next chapter: *Neo-Baroque hybrid forms in light of social concerns*, will investigate whether these Neo-Baroque hybrid forms – in particular the use of new digital media to engulf the viewer in the visual display –allow for a more open discussion about body politics. It will also investigate the contrasting of reality with illusion in order to make people question reality itself and renegotiate social boundaries relating to the body.

CHAPTER 4: NEO-BAROQUE HYBRID FORMS IN LIGHT OF SOCIAL CONCERNS

In this chapter the intention is to determine whether new Neo-Baroque hybrid art forms may be used to represent a more comprehensive, socially mixed, cultural product by combining old and new (techniques and technology), with various references in order to engage the viewer in the spectacle. Through the analysis of artworks by Vári, Mntambo, and Cohen, the use of hybrid art forms will be explored. The aim here is to note how various media are combined, and to examine the impact of new digital technology in engulfing the viewer in the spectacle.

It will be argued that the hybrid is used by contemporary artists to deliver commentary about social concerns and body politics, by referencing reality against the artist's representation in order to make people re-evaluate their own lives. The intention is to prove that new media art forms allow artists to break social and cultural boundaries as a form of resistance, to contest issues relating to body politics about which they feel strongly. These Neo-Baroque hybrid forms combine contradictory and multiple references with various media and technologies. This pushes the limits of the artwork beyond the norm and ruptures boundaries and is aimed at creating spectacle and shock as the viewer begins to interpret and interact with these complex art forms.

4.1 Neo-Baroque hybridity

According to Salgado (1999:320)Neo-Baroque art forms allow for a more comprehensive and open notion of culture. He (1999:320) further explains that artists tend to choose a more universal approach, using diverse ethnicities, classes, and economic peoples in order to renegotiate and reconstruct social ideals through art. Ndalianis (2005:94) agrees that the Neo-Baroque embraces multiple possibilities and directions, thereby creating various hybrid options for our culture. This process of combining various social references and styles leads to the creation of new hybrid forms.

Salgado (1999:317) argues that hybridity has previously been a problematic in colonial depiction, and is used by post-colonial artists to reverse the effects of colonial differentiation. This allows previously denied cultural values to be acknowledged, as well as to renegotiate boundaries which were used to define their position within the dominant discourse. To achieve these aims, hybridising strategies are used by the colonised subject as they incorporate Baroque elements in the dominant discourse. Bhabha (2001:34) also argues that the hybrid is used as an approach to reverse the processes of domination established during colonial times. According to Salgado (1999:317) the hybrid is used to create a context for cultural resistance, a strategy that has continued into the post-colonial era. Although these views were originally used within a

Latin American context, they may be applied and be relevant to South African art. The question becomes, what is the Neo-Baroque artist's use of the hybrid? Could it be to reverse colonialism as did the post-colonial artists, or is it merely employed to represent a more inclusive approach in South African culture? Could it be a more tactile strategy used by artists as a form of resistance, used to transgress social boundaries through excess?

As noted by Salgado (1999:317), the Neo-Baroque became the source of hidden cultural differences within society, mutated through the combination of unacceptable cultural aspects which the dominant ideology tries to oppress. In this case, the hybrid can be seen as a masked symbol of difference within the dominant culture, as defiant signs to current social conditions (Salgado 1999:318). Within a South African context, these may be found in aspects of culture denied during the colonial and Apartheid times, or with reference to Apartheid atrocities that the country would rather not acknowledge, or to more current concerns relating to racism, corruption and a concern for the general state of the country. In South Africa there is a mixture of cultures and identities which are continuously in a state of change creating a hybrid society. Doy (2000:134) explains that this hybridity allows people to recreate their identity, thereby removing stereotypes.

Canclini (1993:78) notes how hybrid cultures propose 'social morphologies', a space of rupture which allows artists to break boundaries. He (1993:78) further explains that hybrid cultures are dynamic, continuously alter, and incorporate different cultural elements which interconnect and have multiple forms and ideas in a constant state of transformation. Therefore, the hybrid references something that simultaneously belongs to separate cultural and social areas, with no permanent identity (Canclini 1993:78). According to Lionnet (1995:13) processes of appropriation have increased cultural complexity which can be found within the hybrid. Artists tend to combine various aspects of our multi-cultural society, creating hybrid forms which often become excessive as they draw on multiple points of reference as a means of revealing social difference. For Bhabha (1995:35) the hybrid is an expression of an ambivalent space. As already noted, ambiguity, particularly in relation to identity, becomes an appropriate tool for artists to create excess and the abject, as it transgresses social boundaries and reveals social anxieties. Within the South African multi-culture, due to changes over the last three decades, it could be said that the hybrid and ambivalences express social uncertainties.

The development of new digital technologies and advances in global communication can be seen to intensify hybridising processes. Canclini (1993:83) explains that new cultural technologies open new ways in which to understand the culture of others and reconstruct cultural identities. Santana (2010:226) notes that new forms of creativity are embodied in the

emergence of a worldwide media network. According to Ndalianis (2005:4) media technologies, are made up of networks or hybrids that are conveyed in various social and aesthetic expressions. Due to technological developments our society, audiences, and cultural concerns have changed dramatically. "Media merge with media, styles are combined to produce new hybrid forms, narratives open up and extend into its surrounding space, whilst special effects construct illusions that try to remove the frame that divides the viewer from the spectacle" (Ndalianis 2005:2). Ndalianis (2005:4) further states that this creates new forms of 'techno-intertextuality', creating new ways for the viewer to experience the production and increase media knowledge. This allows artists to find new forms of representation and ways of addressing their concerns and communicating these concepts to the public. It becomes evident here that Ndalianis is referring to entertainment media such as film, but this view may be applied to the arts, particularly artworks that make use of new digital technologies in a Neo-Baroque aesthetic.

Media growth, as discussed by Darley (2000:69), has resulted in an overflowing of information, which has moved society away from meaning and moved their interest to surface spectacle, movement and detail. He (Darley 2000:81) further notes that the inclination to spectacle is dependent on the abilities of technology and the digital media influences which exist within visual culture. The multitude of electronic media which have arisen over the last two decades have been largely focussed on special effect spectacles that aim to overwhelm their audiences in the illusion (Ndalianis [sa]). As a result, the spectator of contemporary visual digital culture expects a certain amount of intensity in the visual and sensorial experience (Darley 2000:171). Kennedy (2009:154) believes that society has become dramatised as well as accustomed and manipulated by the mass-media, thereby forcing artists to find new ways of attracting their viewers' attention.

Spectacle is often achieved through hybrid forms that present aspects of an increase in inter-textual reference, and a increased sense of realism or illusion of reality, which often becomes excessive (Darley 2000:132). This trend in contemporary visual culture (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]) can be seen to align with the Neo-Baroque approach toward inference and inter-textuality, revealing a search for righteousness through mesmerising visual and auditory illusions linked directly to digital advances. According to Collins (1995:159) the correlation between modernization and conventional practice is in a continuous process of being adapted and hybridized.

Similar to the Baroque, the Neo-Baroque can be seen to exploit technological advances by moving the border which separates representation from reality, enhancing human perception

(Ndalianis 2005:152). Neo-Baroque art forms can be seen to use a combination of the optical and auditory in a manner that draws on similarities to the Baroque style, the only difference being that it is expressed in technologically and culturally different ways (Ndalianis 2004).This was evident in previously discussed works by Cohen and Mntambo, both of whom used video and digital computer programmes adapted to current cultural concerns. Since new media allows artists to transform themselves, it would seem to be an appropriate means to create hybrid forms.

The twentieth century Baroque aesthetic has altered its identity to become a style in diverse areas of arts, which continuously adapts to current circumstances. Neo-Baroque art forms have managed to insert their identity into a variety of art modes, continuing to adapt to the developments in new media, which are cultivated by a culture attracted to the visual and sensorial sensation which is relevant to the emergence of the Neo-Baroque form (Ndalianis 2004). The works become excessive as artists use a combination of methods, references, and mediums.

According to Calabrese (1992:62) the Neo-Baroque reveals an   of visual presentation in terms of content, surface, detail, reference, as well as in spatial terms. This form of representation stirs the uncanny within the viewer through its interaction with the illusionistic nature of the art work characteristic of the Neo-Baroque (Degli-Esposti 1996b:82). Ndalianis (2004: [sp]) holds that the Baroque's infatuation with imitation and the questioning of social existence has been adapted to a contemporary cultural context. She (2004: [sp]) explains that technology is used to construct imaginative spaces that appear to perceptually convert into actuality, while reality itself often seems to combine with the fictive. This comment on entertainment media can be applied to forms of contemporary art that make use of new media, as although images used by artists might appear perceptually realistic, they are often referentially unreal, resulting in a hyper real expression of illusion as reality (Ndalianis [sa]). The experience of such a spectacle is used to create a participatory activity through engagement (Ndalianis [sa]). In this way, transgression through illusion is used to contest the truth of reality and dominant ideologies (Baudrillard 2001:180). The Neo-Baroque's and the Baroque's characteristic of creating spectacle and engaging with the viewer's senses often involves constructing illusions which perceptually appear realistic, momentarily appearing as if there is no frame and the if viewer's space is merged with the artwork's space. This can be seen in many of the works already discussed, for example Cohen's *Chandelier* in which the art work is created in an actual space that the viewer knows. *The weight of the media-the burden of reality* and *Ugly girl at the rugby* incorporate the spectators in the artwork. In all three of these works there is no respect for the frame, as the

spectators and Cohen move in out of the frame as if the artwork continues beyond the frame, the spectator's.

This ambivalence between an illusionistic reality created by artists and the reality it references has left the viewer wondering if our view of the real world is indeed real. Advances in modern digital technologies and the mass media, particularly Hollywood movies, have made almost anything seem possible and real, so that it has become difficult to determine the difference between reality and illusion, or special effects and spectacle. According to Ndalianis (2005:12-14) this is an approach modified from the Baroque style which makes use of destabilisation and the disbelief of reality as truthas a means of questioning dominant ideologies, achieved by use of simulation and illusion. The concern with simulacra of various realities and layers of meaning with multiple references reveal a self-reflection of current social circumstances typical of the Neo-Baroque art style (Ndalianis 2004). This can be seen in works discussed so far, for example Mntambo's transformation of herself into a bull that appears realistic and draws on multiple connotations, to question social constructs. Also, Rose's combinations of performance and digital media generate a sense of illusion within reality, which creates excess through multiple connotations to challenge social boundaries within South Africa.

The Neo-Baroque aesthetic embraces developments in digital media and artists use it to their own advantage. Ndalianis (2005:97) explains that new technologies make possible more instantaneous and individualised contact to the world, as well as to audiences. Contemporary artists are currently able to communicate any idea through a variety of techniques and media (Rush 2005:8). Rush (2005:7-8) argues that this has allowed artists to bring fresh resources into their work, resulting in a change in focus to more personal forms of expression and the development of new ideas. New art media facilitate artists' need to explore ideas, and new forms of communication (Rush 2005:78). This can be seen in the works by Mntambo, Cohen, Vári, and Rose who have used new media - video or digital technologies - to express concerns with social issues relating to body politics. Within contemporary society, which has become so familiar with special effects and digital spectatorship, it seems appropriate that artists move in a similar direction in an effort to ensure that their works make an impact on the viewer.

Rush (2005:28) explains that artists who originally worked in other art forms and have moved on to use new media often transfer their painterly or sculptural abilities to the new media. Darley (2000:191) notes that the development of digital capabilities within conventional media forms happened over a rather short time frame and that artists are continuously evolving their processes of art making to equal visual culture demands. He (2000:132) adds that these emerging images show new levels of surface accuracy and image intensity through an increase

of photographic realism of illusion. The creation of unique imagery through new methods of merging images demonstrates a unique way of image hybridisation made possible by digital techniques (Darley 2000:85). In this way, digital techniques may provide a way to expand concepts that will continuously change the overall style of contemporary art (Darley 2000:82). Artists will be able to push the limits of both old and new media to larger extremes, allowing for greater freedom of expression and means of approaching concerns within society.

Rush (2005:82) draws attention to another trend in art, namely an increasing interest in removing the boundaries between art and contemporary life. He (Rush 2005:106) proposes that the current tendency of artists to experiment often exposes psychological views about their own body's connection to society and to art. New art forms reveal that artists are feeling a sense of unease in today's world and are searching for some form of identity (Rush 2005:117). The artists discussed so far seem to be searching for identity or acceptance within society, whether because of their race or sexuality or gender, and show a sense of alienation from the society in which they function.

Murray (2008:19) states that artistic exploration of what he calls "digital Baroque", as part of the Neo-Baroque aesthetic, shows a shift from the technological to the personal. This has resulted in a revelation of opposing cultural and emotional contexts that expose societal tensions much like in the art of seventeenth century Baroque. Digital Baroque art is critical of many current social trends, and indulges in the tumultuous expression of artistic and social probabilities (Murray 2008:20). South African artists are combining various cultural, economic and political circumstances from the past and present to express their feelings and anxieties about current situations. This approach seems to offer a means of creating a conversation with the viewer, making viewers aware of their own apprehensions about current social conditions.

Santana (2010:232) is of the opinion that digital cultures allow artists to revisit and reconstruct the body. He (Santana 2010:226) also notes that the body is in a continuous relationship with its surroundings, which can be used to assemble cultural constructs and reconfigure society's bodily ideals. Murray (2008:40) moreover holds that digital Baroque forms reveal conceptual approaches to art and art making that setup movements between conflicting cultures, social politics, and ideologies; as a familiar artistic result of electronic crossing points with the Baroque past. According to Degli-Esposti (1996b:87) the main intention is to erase the emphasis on the distinction between gender, race and sexuality, in order to embrace the idea of equality among all people. This allows for a more inclusive, reflection on society. In this chapter, the intention is to discover whether Neo-Baroque artists use the digital and the hybrid as a means of erasing distinction or simply to point out societal tensions and issues.

4.2 Contemporary South African art and Neo-Baroque hybrid forms

According to Harvey (1995:42), the hybrid allows us to envision new identities or to disturb the views of identity. Neo-Baroque artists are creating hybrid forms composed of various references and media forms as a means of reconstructing and disrupting body politics. Tiffin (1995:95) explains that post-colonial cultures like South Africa are unavoidably hybridised, as they are made up of both European and local influences, which in its post-colonial era has an urge to rebuild itself a self-sufficient local identity. Bhabha (1995:34) notes that hybridity is a reinterpretation of colonial identity through the rebuilding of prejudiced identity effects. South African artists are using hybrid forms as a means of exploring their own body politics within their work, and in an effort to understand themselves and to renegotiate their position within society. These hybrid forms often take on monstrous and abject appearances as can be seen in Mntambo's *Narcissus* (Figure 12) and *The rape of Europa* (Figure 11) as well as in most of the previously discussed works by Cohen, Vári, Rose and Hlobo.

4.2.1 *Golgotha by Steven Cohen*

Steven Cohen's *Golgotha* (Figure 19) is a performance video artwork which has been displayed in various spaces (Sassen 2010:90), although versions differ slightly from one another. The original, one-off street performance, which took place in New York, has been turned into a video performance by combining it with other staged performances and audio to create the *Golgotha* performance video piece (Blignaut 2011: [sp]). This discussion will focus mainly on the original performance. The title *Golgotha* is the Hebrew word for 'cranium'. It is a work made with the body and about the body, about how we live and the demands made on us by our consumer-driven society. Cohen comments on our contemporary lifestyle where "anything is for sale and everything concludes in death" (Steven Cohen, South Africa 2008), and the way society has become so dependent on or conscious of mass media and consumer items.

In this performance piece Cohen is wearing a dark business suit and tie, referencing capitalism and its reflection on society's current values. Cohen's face is painted white, with black lipstick and patterning around the eyes and over the nose. Decorative elements which resemble butterfly wings are attached to the top of his head, eyelashes, and tips of his ears. His custom-made stilettos are attached to human skulls. The outfit and makeup reveal a complex hybrid identity which draws on multiple references and connotations which are used to comment on a mixture of aspects of society. Like most of Cohen's work, this performance expresses ways to deal with various identity issues and body politics (Steven Cohen South Africa 2008). Cohen is commenting on contemporary society's way of life and lack of personal identity. In relation to

Salgado's view (1999:317), Cohen is using hybridising strategies by combining various elements from dominant discourse to create a space for cultural resistance.

Figure 19: Steven Cohen, *Golgotha*, 2008.
(Mcintosh 2008).

In an artist's statement Cohen (Golgotha [sa]) says that he is literally bringing the dead into life as he walks on human skulls through streets, shopping centres, and busy metropolitan areas. According to Kristeva (in Creed 1993:9) the human corpse is the ultimate form of abjection. The use of human skulls makes clear Cohen's intention to engage with the abject in his work. Kristeva (1982:3) explains that the corpse and death draw on the abject as it upsets and aggressively confronts society, reminding them of their own inevitable mortality. Cohen appears here to be bringing the reality of death back into our daily life. In South Africa, we are confronted by death on a daily basis with, amongst other factors, violent crime and the AIDS crisis. Cohen's video piece alludes to the fact that we cannot live forever and so spend too much time concerned with material items and similarly unimportant things. Cohen's suit and tie can be seen to reference the contemporary working world, with its potentially health- and life-threatening stressors of job tensions, financial difficulties or unemployment. The work also draws on deeper concerns relating to death and commerce, namely the way Cohen made a pair of stilettos from human skulls. The buying and selling of deceased human body parts is seen as immoral by society and forbidden in most countries (Blignaut 2011:[sp]), even abject. Cohen in an interview with Blignaut (2011: [sp]) revealed that these were real skulls that he bought in a store in New York. In this conversation (Blignaut 2011: [sp]), Cohen remarks: "Is it not the

ultimate insanity of consumerist culture - selling the dead". It highlights the fact that truly everything is for sale and that today's society is largely influenced by consumerism. The fact that Cohen's shoes were made by drilling and so breaking the skulls is even more shocking, thereby becoming transgressive (Gers 2011). Cohen takes this transgression further by walking through the city streets on the skulls, considered an act of disrespect by society. Blignaut (2011: [sp]) maintains that the work also refers to the death of Cohen's brother.

Shoes have become an important signature element in most of Cohen's performances, and he sometimes creates his own. High-heels are usually worn by women when dressing up to go out or to work as a means of glamorising the body, whereas in Cohen's case it is used to create ambiguity. A man in high heels references the less socially approved appearance of a transvestite. According to Gers (2011), shoes, particularly high-heeled shoes, can be seen to cut the wearer off from the earth, a form of elevation. This may link to the idea that the human race has the impression that they will move above death and one day become immortal. In this work it appears as if Cohen is expressing a concern about social obsession with consumerism and material items.

The adapted *Golgotha* is a video piece combining his original street performance in New York with three other stage performances, as well as different audio pieces. The combination of stage and street performance suggests a hybridised space of performance spectacle. The video is divided into five parts, each scene in a different space with different costumes and makeup, each piece being a narrative on its own. Cohen uses a variety of music during the performance video.

The video begins with a close-up view of a hand moving rhythmically to music, and then the camera zooms out to reveal Cohen's elaborate red velvet costume, which has mirrors in between the gold decor. The corset-style costume contrasts strongly against Cohen's pale, bare legs and buttocks, giving the bizarre and excessive effect typical of the Neo-Baroque. Cohen also uses the corset with his exposed legs in other works such as *Chandelier*, to comment on gender and sexual constructs. This is accentuated by his slow, awkward movements which emphasise his unsteady heels and uncomfortable outfit.

In the next scene, his hands appearing to be dark spots, move towards each other, emerging from the dark as the screen slowly becomes lighter. This use of light and dark to emphasise aspects of the work is again typical of the Baroque. In the third scene, Cohen dances on an empty stage to the rhythm of music from a record player that he holds. He is dressed in a black lacy corset with gold trim, and black leather heeled boots shaped like the hooves of a goat. The camera zooms out to a crucifix shape made from what, according to Blignaut (2011: [sp]), are

vintage lamps. Here Cohen's face has been excessively decorated with glitter and butterfly wing accessories with a butterfly bow adorning his neck. Cohen sits down and unties his shoes, momentarily being distracted by the music playing from record player.

The fourth scene relates to the original *Golgotha*, with Cohen dressed as described before in the business suit with skull stilettos. As Cohen walks through the busy city streets, he struggles to keep his balance, while passers-by stop to stare and shout comments. He waits at an intersection for the pedestrian light to change, then crosses the street, stopping in front of a church where he gets down on his haunches in a pose of meditation. After this he stands and crosses back over the busy street. The audio from the original footage can be heard in the background with Cohen's footsteps, the comments of the passers-by and the noise of the cars and city. The video shifts back to the previous scene, where Cohen, barefoot, is dancing to the music. Finally, he puts his shoes back on, which are now decorated with dollar bills; the scene darkens and the ornaments laid out in a cross formation on the floor light up like small lamps. The scene ends with Cohen walking over and breaking the ornaments as he exits the stage.

This video embraces some similarities with the Baroque. For example, the stage scenery and outfits reveal an obsession with decoration and detail which goes to the extreme (Wollen 1993:173). The five different scenes appear to be individual and unrelated to each other, also typical of the Baroque style favouring a degree of chaos with no order or reason (Ndalianis 2005:8). According to Ndalianis (2005:15) the Baroque artists usually favour multiple and disjointed formations made up of multifaceted layers. She (2005:33) goes onto mention that Neo-Baroque narratives often merge and extend into and form part of one another. This can be seen in *Golgotha* as different scenes are merged which makes the video appear fragmented. The audio heightens this effect as it is not continuous throughout the video and changes abruptly in places.

Above all this work reveals how performance art can play on the notion of illusion within the reality of everyday life. *Golgotha* can clearly be read as an example of Neo-Baroque art, as it combines various references to engage the viewers and push them into questioning their own reality about the world. Due to the street performance taking place within the reality of the everyday world, Cohen is an actual corporeal presence - despite his appearance and costume, which aids in creating the illusionary dynamic in the work. Sassen (2010:90) comments on how the work seems to offer a sense of engagement, as seen in the viewer's reaction to the work, which could be due to the perception that Cohen is well known for his shock tactics. The audience appears stunned by the unexpected spectacle, and some seem shocked at details such as the skulls. This is particularly evident in the live performance, as passers-by are not quite

sure of what to make of the strange event they are witnessing. The fact that Cohen uses his own body is the basis of the work's most powerful illusion, as he becomes part of the spectral illusion (Murray 2008:37). Darley (2000:6) states that a change has transpired in contemporary visual culture in that it favours an aesthetic that highlights appearance and sensory engagement, which Cohen deliberately plays on in his work, making a spectacle of himself.

According to Ndalianis (2005:157-159) the Baroque and Neo-Baroque spectacle contests traditional views on realism, choosing an adapted view of the real world instead. This is used as means of opening up space for uncertainty and creating the illusion of integration of a synthetic reality within reality itself . She (Ndalianis2005:187) further notes that an artist's interest in reality as illusion reveals an increased cultural distress regarding the nature of reality. Cohen's appearance is so bizarre, that it appears fictional, yet the use of his own corporeal body within an actual environment makes it real. As Degli-Esposti (1996b:80) notes, within the Neo-Baroque style there is a play on what is and what seems to be, in what she claims is "a labyrinth of interesting self-conscious citations". By using his own body in his performance, as well as commenting on identity, Cohen also refers to issues within society such as how current conditions created by capitalism may impact on people and their way of life.

In its choice of theme, *Golgotha* can be seen to draw on the particular Baroque aesthetic which explores death, considered as abject, and its bizarreness to arouse wonder in the viewer (Eco 2007:169). Cohen's work refers to death, even horror, as the abject is known to shock and horrify society. Wollen (1993:173) further emphasises that the Baroque style was known to be dramatic, with artists striving for the spectacular and often incorporating the fictive within their work. These elements are seen in *Golgotha*: Cohen's character has been created from his own imagination, appropriating aspects of contemporary society. Cohen's defiantly outrageous costume is dramatic and he deliberately turns himself into a freak, giving the work a sense of the carnivalesque, another characteristic of the Baroque style.

The viewer is drawn into the work, not only through sight, but through the audio aspect as well. The *Golgotha* video performance has been combined with audio soundtrack by *Anthony and the Johnsons*, which creates a sense of dialogue in the exhibition space (Sassen 2010:90). According to Sassen (2010:90) the digital and electronic art forms have created a technically brilliant piece. The work combines various new technological media in conjunction with the more traditional art medium of performance, creating a hybrid art form - these merging art forms firmly align it with the Neo-Baroque aesthetic. The viewer engages in a technological spectacle and sensory experience, where the meaning becomes dependent upon the viewer's ability to understand complex visual and auditory texts (Ndalianis 2004). The combination of

audio and visual interplay help make the performance piece seem more real, as the viewer is forced to use more than one sense. It could be said that this produces dynamism within the work, another important aspect of the Baroque, as demonstrated in Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (Adams 2002:669). However, here it is expressed in technological and culturally different ways, made possible by the advancements in digital media.

Similar to the Baroque, Neo-Baroque artists are displaying an intrigue with imitation, but have adapted their questioning of the world around them to the contemporary cultural context within which they live. This is used as a formal strategy to dispute the truth of dominant social constructs, as well as concerns relating to the self and bodily difference. Illusions are created to haze the division between fiction and reality (Ndalianis 2004). From the viewer, these works demand perception and active engagement with the image or, in this case, the video performance. Innovative effects make the viewer's experiences seem real, causing illusion to collapse into reality. The images may appear to be realistic, but they are actually fictional (Ndalianis [Sa]). According to Valerie Steele (1996:143) the use of illusion which appears to be real has a powerful appeal, as it becomes a sensory experience which incorporates tactility, hearing, and visual qualities, which in combination with their symbolic associations create a strong emotional response within the viewer. Baudrillard (2001:2) states that this sense of hyper-reality in our contemporary environment is a state within society created by advances in communication technologies and media, revealing a strange mixture of fantasy and desire that is unique to the twenty-first century. A potential infinite use of signs is used within culture and is employed as a means to order society while providing the individual with an illusionary sense of freedom and individuality (Baudrillard 2001:3).

4.2.2 *Europa by Nandipha Mntambo*

Mntambo's digital print *Europa* (Figure 20), embraces the new digital media art forms. This work is a self-portrait of Mntambo in which the image of her face has been partially morphed into that of a bull by superimposing her face with animal fur, and bull horns and ears, while her facial shape, nose, and lips still retain some human attributes. Her neck and body have been left unchanged and reveal the nude skin of a black woman, which fades into the dark background, simultaneously drawing on the erotic and the abject.

In this work, the bull-like Mntambo is directly gazing at and confronting the viewer. The horns and shoulders of the figure are angled as if the creature is ready to charge the viewer. The creature's stance, direct gaze, and facial expression are aggressive, as if challenging or daring the viewer into a confrontation; in particular the bull-like Mntambo appears to be challenging

dominant and African cultural notions of the gaze, since, as noted previously, in African culture direct eye contact is seen as disrespectful and is done mostly to challenge a person's authority (Martin 2010: [sp]). The gaze is a significant facet to be considered when working with the subject of the female or black body, and, if used aptly, can reconstruct concepts relating to body ideals. As also noted earlier, according to Mahon (2005:51), the gaze within an artwork can help strengthen the artist's message and resist social oppression within society by using eroticism as a means to undermine bodily constructs of difference. In *Europa,* viewers find themselves in an uncomfortable position, as this figure subjects the viewer to the gaze, so making the viewer the point of her focus. Mntambo transforms her nude female figure into part animal, becoming abject, even monstrous, rather than desirable, reversing erotic, abject, and fetish roles.

Europa is based on the Greek myth *The rape of Europa* (Figure 8), as discussed in Chapter Three. As noted, in this myth, Zeus turned himself into a white bull in pursuit of Europa. In this particular work, Mntambo inverts conventions of gender as well as Classical Western mythology by partly transforming herself into a black bull. As is well known cattle (including the bull) play a significant role in many traditional African cultures, such as Xhosa and Zulu societies. According to Boddy-Evans ([sa]), in Sotho cultures a black bull is sacrificed during times of drought as a rain ritual, while in Zulu cultures, a bull is beaten to death by Zulu men as part of 'Ukweshwama', a ceremony that celebrates the new fruit harvest (Bearak 2009). In a number of Southern African cultural traditionsa bride's worth is measured in cattle 'loboloa' is a customary form of payment in which a father exchanges his daughter for cattle (Dugmore [sa] & Culture [sa]). The work hence references a multifaceted interaction of myth, gender, race, culture, and bodily transformation (Malcomess 2008:133). Drawing on various constructs and interweaving traditional European legends with her own African body and culture, Mntambo leaves the viewer to make sense of the intertextual references, which is typical of the Neo-Baroque style (Ndalianis 2005:4). Also, the referencing of various cultures highlights South Africa as a hybrid society composed of various cultures and traditions.

Figure 20: Nandipha Mntambo, *Europa*, 2008.
Photograph courtesyof Michael Stevenson Gallery.
(Perryer 2009:34).

Mntambo furthermore combines traditional portraiture with digital technology to enhance the illusion and at the same time create a hybrid form, characteristic of the Neo-Baroque. This work demonstrates how contemporary technology is used to create spectacle, in this case through digital photography in combination with computer image editing programmes. Here, the morphing of a bull and a human creates a hybrid African human species. In this way, *Europa* pushes the boundaries between reality and illusion, as the bull-like creature simultaneously appears so realistic, yet also fictitious. When confronted with the work, the viewer must question the nature of reality, another formal Neo-Baroque strategy (Ndalianis 2004: [sp]). This realistic animalistic form also functions as a highly erotic signifier, challenging traditional social constructs about the ideal body and further emphasising excess.

The *Europa* figure, in its hybrid form, takes on a monstrous quality, as it is half-human and half-animal, an ambiguous creature which transgresses social boundaries relating to body politics. Mntambo draws on the abject as she deliberately makes a spectacle of herself. According to Russo (1995:56), the work also exploits the taboos which are used to construct the female body as grotesque turning herself into a hybrid creature. The artist's uses of

representational transgression, as considered within the context of Russo's (1995:59) writing, is used as a means of creating social change and recreating the female body. Russo (1995:61) comments that the figure of the female as transgressor and public spectacle is a strong tool, and the use of this type of representation in art to demystify the female body has numerous possibilities. She (1995:65) further notes that this approach has been used by many artists to disturb idealizations of female beauty and to change notions of desire, as the female body has become a sign of excess (Russo 1995:67), but this is yet to be discussed within a Neo-Baroque context. It appears then that Mntambo uses her own body as means of commenting on such constructs relating to the female and black body within society. By digital manipulation, Mntambo deliberately adds undesirable qualities to her female body, namely the animal fur, horns and ears, as well as the aggressive pose. This effect is achieved through a combination of modern technology used to reconstruct the human form and merge the animal features so as to appear real.

This work engages the viewer with its technological skill and multiple references, and shocks the viewer by the suggestion that the human could become animal or of the creature of one's desires may be something between human and beast. Within a post-colonial and South African context, the work carries deeper meaning as it alludes to the idea constructed by the colonisers that black people were uncivilized and closer to animals on the evolutionary scale than were European peoples (Doy 2000:4). According to Enwezor (1999:252), in gazing back as the monstrous Other, the artist arguably confronts heteronormative constructs in an attempt to take control of her own identity while at the same time forcing the viewers to participate in this act in confronting their own fears which are embedded within the abject or Other body.

Europa shows characteristics of the Neo-Baroque hybrid in its multiple inter-textual references, the combination of new technology with the traditional art form of portraiture, and the play on illusion within the context of the real, are all used to create a spectacle as means to question social boundaries. Like Cohen, Mntambo uses her own body to contest issues relating to body constructs such as gender and sexuality. Both these artists turn their bodies into hybrid human forms, which simultaneously reference different aspects of their societies and cultures, to confront and shock the viewer by creating a spectacle of themselves as they transgress social boundaries about body constructs. It would seem as if the exploration of the hybrid within art contributes to excess, a rather common characteristic of the Neo-Baroque style.

4.2.3 *The calling by Minnette Vári*

Vári's *The calling,* (Figure 21, 22 & 23), is a video artwork created in 2003 which combines video, digital technology and performance art. In this work, the artist is seen crouching on the roof of a building, her silhouette against a dark cityscape (Van der Watt 2004b:30). The work has been filmed in black and white, on a misty morning in Johannesburg. In the film the female figure is seen moving across the rooftops of the city, crawling behind barbed wire and above thronging crowds against a background of the city's skyscrapers and lights (Peffer 2003:25). The manner in which the nude figure crouches and moves takes on the characteristic of an animal crawling or prowling the rooftops.

In the video piece various video clips and imagery change and merge into one another as the screen splits into two night cityscapes, and then changes into a record player. Vári's figure disappears and the video shifts once again to display a radio tower on both sides of the split screen. A bird flies across the screen from left to right joining the two video frames, going beyond the frame into the next. Vári's nude figure reappears, overloaded by camera equipment and a sleeping bag, watching the city from above (Van der Watt 2004b:30). Peffer (2003:25) comments that the figure appears nervous as she moves and peers over the roof top. As she moves slowly across the roof, crossing from one screen to the next, her figure becomes mixed and blurred in with the continuously changing and morphing surroundings (Schoeman 2004:55), creating unique hybrid images. The figures mouth opens and gags as a lizard is expelled, which evaporates into the dark sky (Van der Watt 2004b:30). This refers to a classic French fable about a young girl who is cursed to produce only toads and reptiles whenever she tries to speak, as punishment for refusing to help an old woman. According to Kristeva (1982:71) vomiting is seen as abject within society, and this scene is bizarre, an illusion made to appear real with the aid of contemporary digital technology. The video can be seen as hybrid, not only through its complexity and layering of various images, but also through the morphing of Vári's body and her surroundings into other forms.

Figure 21: Minnette Vári, *The Calling*, 2003.
(Geers 2004:83).

Peffer (2003:25) believes that the work reveals a technical skill in studio production, which has allowed Vári to work more closely with her own body in her process of art making. According to Van der Watt (2004b:30), the work challenges the viewer, as the viewer is forced to access different references simultaneously in order to make sense of the work. These include the location, Vári's naked white body which morphs into that of a gargoyle, and the vomited reptile. The multiple references and combination of media transform the work into a hybrid art form typical of the Neo-Baroque genre.

The work is situated within a South African context in being performed against the recognizable Johannesburg cityscape. As is noted by Schoeman (2004:55) Vári's figure takes on a hybrid and monstrous form, as in parts of the video she resembles a living gargoyle, due mainly to her posture and position on the edge of the roof, as well as the load attached to her back which causes her to take on the silhouette of a gargoyle (Figure 22). Aspects of the work, such as the vomiting of the reptile, draw on the abject; and the morphing of the female body into a gargoyle becomes almost excessive in its monstrosity. The work also references the uncanny, as it simultaneously draws on the familiar and unfamiliar through the combining of this nude female figure/gargoyle and the cityscape. Dennis (2009:20) states that the nudity of the female body is always obscene in discrepancy to the male nude. In this way, Vári's nude figure, with her animal-like characteristics, is transgressive because it exceeds social boundaries and the limitations placed upon the body by society.

Figure 22: Minnette Vári, *The Calling*, 2003.
(Geers 2004:80).

Figure 23: Minnette Vári, *The Calling*, 2003.
(Geers 2004:80).

According to Van der Watt (2004b:30), Vári's work can be seen as exploring the uncertain spaces that our new government has produced for South Africans. She (Van der Watt 2004b:31) argues that Vári comments on the displacement of the post-colonial individual in an ever-changing world, which is revealed through the use of her own body as a personal and intimate struggle for identity in a shifting South African society. Vári's search for identity or sense of belonging within South Africa may also be read as engaging the body politics of being white in a post-Apartheid South Africa (Van der Watt 2004b:31). The work reveals Vári's sense of dislocation within her own country, and her realisation that many other South Africans may be experiencing the same sense of alienation and dislocation due to the many political, economic and social changes. These changes and the combination of different cultures in South Africa have created a hybrid society.

This exchange or hybridising of cultures within South African society leads Vári to explore the grotesque in her work. The images reveal an uncanny element, as the unfamiliar, strange figures

retain familiar human qualities. Peffer (2003:28) believes that the work can be seen to create perverse resemblances, where fears and obsessions about current social circumstances become obvious. Geers (2004:12) notes that in Vári's work the body is continuously changing and morphing, which establishes the body as the site of contestation inscribed within history and regulated by social systems. In this way Vári's work combines the practice of art making with the contestation of social concerns, both on a personal level as well as within the broader perspective of political and social conditions(Geers2004:12). The work could reference her own experience of having grown up during a time of political, social, and economic change.

Vári, as a Neo-Baroque artist, incorporates traditional media such as performance art with video art and electronic digital technology to create new hybrid art forms. Her hybrid figures are created through these media and technologies by combining and morphing her own body with other forms. The work incorporates various cultural and social references, which can be seen to describe South Africa's complex cultural mixture. In this way Vári may be considered as highlighting contemporary issues of culture and hybridity within South Africa. Vári moreover attempts to articulate a more socially mixed scenario of cultural product, while at the same time alluding to uncertainties and tensions hidden beneath the surface.

According to Bhabha (2001:34) hybridity is a common and effective way of undermining dominant values since it demonstrates the necessary deformation and dislocation of all forms of inequity and dominance. The hybrid in art thus becomes a site of creative resistance of the dominant ideal. Creative practices that incorporate hybrid approaches make visible and instigate practices of renewal and opposition which direct the construction of identity in colonial and post-colonial contexts(Lionnet1995:6-7). Lionnet (1995:6) believes that artists aim to recreate new creative spaces where power formations can be used to reconstruct society to allow for a more inclusive and fair assembly of knowledge.

4.2 Conclusion

In efforts to transgress social boundaries, Neo-Baroque artists often exploit multiple points of reference within culture while combining new media technologies with traditional art mediums to create new hybrid art forms. In the process new hybrid art forms are created and used to reconstruct social ideals and address crises within the country. These hybrid forms make use of multiple cultural and social references which articulate a more inclusive, ethnically and socially mixed representation. The Neo-Baroque has become a source of cultural alternatives, which continuously morphs and develops through the combination of cultural elements and social values.

Such combinations often result in hybridization which functions not only to describe South Africa's complex racial and multi-cultural mixture, but also to highlight contemporary issues of culture and hybridity. Baroque elements are incorporated into the dominant discourse to create a context for resistance.

All the artists discussed in this chapter combine their own bodies in some form with new media. Cohen, Mntambo, and Vári transform their bodies into some sort of hybrid ambiguous human form which draws on the abject and even monstrous, and is shown to be an important characteristic of the Neo-Baroque aesthetic. In Cohen's work, hybridity is found in multiple references, as well as his costume and makeup which create a complex hybrid identity, establishing excess. In Mntambo's work, the hybrid can be identified in her monstrous form, half-human and half-animal, an ambiguous creature, disturbing boundaries and creating excess. In Vári's work, excess can be found in the figure's monstrosity as her female body is transformed into the hybrid gargoyle. Hybridity is also evident in the combination of references through the use of new media.

These forms of the Neo-Baroque aesthetic of hybridity and moreover often employ spectacle, which is used to shock the viewer and, by the manipulation of excess, pushes on social boundaries. Another element which adds to the generation of excess in the works of these three artists is the use of the abject and erotic. It has been shown, moreover, that when combined with performances or the theatrical, as well as combining such bodily performances with new technologies, the works become potent and able to disturb dominant constructs about the body.

5. CONCLUSION

This research paper set out to investigate the appearance of a Neo-Baroque aesthetic of excess in South African art through the analysis of contemporary art works by artists who make use of the body or themes relating to body politics. The intention was to investigate the aims of these artists and establish whether this aesthetic could be considered a form of resistance to social concerns. The question was posed as to whether this aesthetic expresses a sense of crisis similar to that provoking the seventeenth-century Baroque. It was suggested that South African artists are combining post-colonial and postmodern ideals in combination with Neo-Baroque excess and hybridity to establish sites of resistance and represent a more inclusive culture within their art.

5.1 Summary of Chapters

In *Chapter Two: Neo-Baroque artistic practices*, the aim was to establish the emergence of the Neo-Baroque art style in South African art by researching the comparison between seventeenth-century Baroque art styles and the Neo-Baroque. To this aim, writings on the Neo-Baroque in contemporary cultures were applied to contemporary South African artworks. Many similarities between the two styles became apparent when analysing the artworks, such as the connections that were drawn between Bernini's *The ecstasy of Saint Teresa* or Caravaggio's *The conversion of Saint Paul*, and the work of Hlobo and Cohen.

The Baroque and Neo-Baroque were influenced by advances in their technologies - seventeenth-century scientific discoveries and twenty-first century electronic and digital media - as well as being affected by significant political changes (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]). The seventeenth-century Baroque was an era of industrialism and political changes in the monarchy (Martin 1977:12), while the Neo-Baroque was influenced by globalisation (Buci-Glucksmann 1994:3-4, 23).

In the South African context, the Neo-Baroque style has evolved due to not only the globalisation and technological innovations which have impacted on world societies, but also because of other contributing factors, namely economic, social, and political changes (Buci-Glucksmann 1994:3-4, 23). Baroque characteristics and the Neo-Baroque aesthetic, as demonstrated in South African artworks, reveal a concern for social circumstances. The Neo-Baroque exploits the aesthetic of excess through several means, such as multiple references and inferences; the transgressing of social limits (Calabrese 1992:58-59); the use of a variety of media combined with advanced technology (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]); and the tendency to establish movement through the actions of a single figure/subject (Bazin 1968:103). As well as the visual, these artists also rely on the tactile as seen in their use of an abundance of detail. This is evident in Hlobo's *Ndimnandi Ndindodwa* (Figure 5), where there is an profusion of materials and fine

details. The folds in the fabric spread outwards into the surrounding space, reminiscent of Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (Figure 1), and in both compositions a single form establishes movement. Hlobo's sculptural form references sexual activities to challenge social boundaries, so as to renegotiate constructs about homosexuality within society, which, according to Calabrese (1992:59), themes of sexuality are used to establish erotic excess typical of the Neo-Baroque style. The materials and details used to create the sculptural form carry tactile connotations as a way of arousing the viewer's senses.

In Cohen's *Chandelier* (Figures 7 and 8), the Neo-Baroque became evident in the following ways; through the combination of digital media and performance art; the juxtaposition of connotations and references used to reveal a heightened complexity; the way that Cohen used his own body to highlight social concerns within South Africa; and his costume and make-up (De Villiers 2008:22), which have outrageous detail. Again, the variety of all these elements results in an aesthetic of excess. The work is strange and conveys themes of devastation as did the Baroque (Eco 2007:169). In this work, Cohen makes a spectacle of himself to heighten the drama and create a response within the viewer, typical of the Baroque and aligned to a Neo-Baroque approach.

In Vári's *Oracle* (Figures 9 and 10), the Baroque could be found in the multiple references and inferences. Vári uses her own body to establish movement within the art work and exploits new media and digital technology to reflect her view on current social conditions. The work combines old newspaper reports with the contemporary, and is loaded with detail which creates excess and increases the complexity of the work.

Rose's *Lucie's fur version 1:1:1* (Figure 6) demonstrates aspects of the Neo-Baroque in her use of digital media, as well as through the layers of meaning inscribed in the work. Rose's composition seems planned around the actions of a single body, creating dynamism, again typical of the Baroque. Her body is used to comment on various issues relating to body politics within South Africa, as well as religion and history. Excess occurs due to the multiple references and meanings within the work.

Each of these artists intends to provoke a reaction within the viewer, often through spectacle or transgression. Through the analysis of the artworks the emergence of a Baroque and Neo-Baroque style became apparent in South African art, found most evidently though excess. It became clear that the Neo-Baroque is often used by the artists as a way of commenting on social concerns. Although these artists' works are different in style and choice of media, central to the interpretation of their works lay the common factor of their use of their own bodies.

In *Chapter Three: The Neo-Baroque as a sign of social crisis*, the intention was to discuss whether a Neo-Baroque aesthetic was being used as a form of resistance in South African art, and if such a resistance expressed a sense of crisis similar to the seventeenth-century Baroque style. It was speculated that the Neo-Baroque could be a reaction to post-colonialism which aimed to address issues of identity.

In Mntambo's work *Narcissus* (Figure 12) and *The rape of Europa* (Figure 11), the artist explored advances in new media to create her own contemporary narrative of a European myth in such a manner that, although manipulated, the images appear real. The work has a tactile quality that provokes erotic and abject associations. Central to the meaning of Mntambo's work is the expression of social concerns relating to body politics, as well as the transgression of social beliefs about the body. She achieved this by turning her body into a monstrous abject creature, which was neither human nor completely animal, but rather an ambiguous hybrid combination of human and bull. Further, the act of rape that this animal is about to perform transgresses sexual taboos, so establishing excess through the overcoming of social systems. However, excess can also be found within the complexity of the work in its multiple references and inferences. This form of resistance, which reflects a concern for body politics, could be seen as a reaction to current social conditions. The use of the abject and erotic to shock the viewer is neither a new approach nor a recognised feature of the Neo-Baroque, as it can also be found in the Baroque. Still, it remains part of how Mntambo has chosen to deal with current concerns around an identity crisis typical of neo-colonial studies.

In Farber's *Skinless II* (Figure 13)*,* the abject was used to establish shock and disgust by creating a form which realistically portrays a human body part, and so referencing a corpse. This sculptural form emphasises detail and incorporates a variety of everyday materials carrying their own connotations. The erotic was highlighted as some of the objects had fetishist associations. Such an approach not only created a hybrid art form through its unique combination of materials, but also became complex through the many references and layers of objects. The work was read as a reflection on current social values relating to both consumer society and the quest for the ideal body. Post-colonialism aimed to reconstruct the old colonial notions around the ideal body and the removal of categories of bodily difference. Farber removes bodily difference by appearing to peel back the skin and the external appearance in the process, as skin is the basis for establishing the Other; also, Farber refers to materials that carry both male and female associations. The act of 'de-gloving' a human arm also removes racial categorisation, possibly underlining the fact that categories used to establish difference are meaningless once a person is dead. As discussed, excess arises from a combination of materials

and references, as well as the reference to the abject and erotic, all of which disturb social systems. The work can hence be seen to reflect on current social circumstances in South Africa within a Neo-Baroque aesthetic of excess.

Cohen's *The weight of the media-the burden of reality* (Figure 14) and *Ugly girl at the rugby* (Figure 15), are performances where he uses his own body to contest body constructs and social concerns (De Villiers 2008:25-28). Social boundaries are further challenged through the erotic, as he uses materials with fetishist associations, such as the corset, stilettos and leopard print fabric (De Villiers 2008:9). Cohen questions sexual and body politics by referring to different cultures as well as different social views, contrasting dominant values against his own views on oppressed masculinity and homosexuality (Du Plessis [sa]:27&33). Overt displays of homosexuality and cross-dressing are considered inappropriate by society, and so become abject, disturbing social boundaries. This gives rise to excess, which is also found in Cohen's abundance of references and meanings. Cohen's costumes are also excessive, as they feature a selection of fantastic items, with an emphasis on detail. Cohen's performance appears spontaneous and bizarre, giving the impression that there is no planned narrative, similar to the Baroque style.

These works highlight some of Cohen's social concerns. In *The weight of the media-the burden of reality* (Figure 14), his performance draws attention to the violence and tragic events happening in South Africa as shown in local newspapers. In *Ugly girl at the rugby* (Figure 15), he draws attention to continuing discrimination towards homosexuality, highlighting how dominant society reinforces its values around masculinity. Addressing issues of identity, marginalisation and the Other aligns his work with post-colonial ideals. However, Cohen uses his own body to address issues of sexual and gender difference through excess, as a means of resistance. Although Cohen uses a postmodern manner of self-reference and self-analysis he applies this to an aesthetic of excess, much like the Neo-Baroque style.

Hlobo's *Izithunz* (Figure 16) and *Umtshotsho* (Figure 17) reference his own Xhosa traditions through the titles and installation, a post-colonial approach. However, reference presented in this context could be seen as a symbol of difference, and used as a form of resistance within dominant society which, according to Salgado (1999:316), is typical of the way the Neo-Baroque in Latin America is used to highlight cultural difference. This installation combines a variety of mediums and everyday items, which are tactile and have their own associations; and the emphasis on detail becomes excessive. There are Baroque elements in the work, such as in the way the folds in the fabric extend into the surrounding space, establishing dynamism and moving beyond the limits of the frame; and the contrasts of light and dark created by strategic

lighting to emphasise aspects of the art work. The work reveals his views on society and concern for current values, as well as the way many cultural traditions have become almost non-existent in contemporary society. The work also shows the discomfort Hlobo feels as a homosexual within his own culture. This work aligns with post-colonial ideals, but it addresses its subject matter within a Neo-Baroque aesthetic, which indulges in excess aesthetics and highlights social unease.

Rose's *Lolita* (Figure 18) combines performance and digital media, namely a more traditional art form with the new, to create a complex image. Excess is achieved through the work's multiple references and inferences, as well as through her costumes and the many items used to create a composition, since it appears deliberately staged. The body becomes central to the composition as it establishes tension and draws attention to identity issues relating to race and gender revealing post-colonial concerns. As mentioned when discussing Rose's work, this work becomes transgressive in the way it challenges social values about the body through abject and erotic associations created by her pose, costume, and makeup. The work demonstrates a self-reference and parody which is typical of postmodern art styles; however, this work has an aesthetic of excess typical of the Neo-Baroque. This form of parody, in which Rose makes a spectacle of herself, is another Baroque trait, used here to unsettle the viewer. Upon viewing and interpreting the work, it appears as if the image can be seen as a site of resistance used to contest social concerns.

This chapter has shown that South African artists today are striving to make a difference and improve society. Almost two decades after the fall of the Apartheid regime, there are still many social issues relating to multiculturalism and individuality that still need to be addressed, as discrimination and marginalisation continue to thrive. The artists discussed show their concern for current social conditions in South Africa, which rather than improving, may have been merely camouflaged.

In this research it became apparent that artists in this post-colonial era still feel anxious about certain issues such as sexuality, gender, race, and general social conditions. They have embraced Neo-Baroque aesthetics as an alternative approach to dealing with body politics in their work and to make society aware of their concerns. Their work reflects not only uncertainty about current social conditions but indeed even a sense of social crisis due to other current circumstances within the country, which in part are a result of consumerism, financial, global, and political influences.

This may be seen to resemble the conditions from which earlier Baroque styles manifested when times of social predicament impacted on artistic creation (Degli-Esposti 1996b:77). The advancements in digital technology as well as current social conditions have established the basis for the emergence of Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess within South African art (Ndalianis 2005:5). In the works discussed it became evident that Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess are often achieved through the use of the abject and the erotic as a means of overcoming social boundaries and renegotiating body politics. Cohen, Rose, and Mntambo use their own bodies to express their social concerns. Also, the use of the body as a site of resistance seems appropriate, particularly in light of the fact that the colonialists and Apartheid enforcers used their own body politics to establish their dominance in South Africa by constructing the coloured, black, homosexual, and even female body as subordinate to the white male. These artists hence use their bodies to contest post-colonial issues in an abject, even monstrous way in an attempt to shock society into awareness of their unease. Excess is mostly established through abject and erotic associations, and in combination with multiple references, so aligning itself with the most obvious characteristic of the Neo-Baroque.

In *Chapter Four: Neo-Baroque hybrid forms in light of social concerns*, the intention was to explore whether the use of the hybrid within a Neo-Baroque aesthetic could be used to reconstruct or influence social systems, by revealing a more inclusive culture. It was of particular interest to investigate how new media aided in the creation of hybridity. The purpose of the hybrid as a possible site of resistance was also examined.

In Steven Cohen's *Golgotha* (Figure 19) hybridity became evident through the art work's complexity, as the work drew on multiple references and connotations which were combined in a seemingly disordered manner. The hybrid was apparent in Cohen's monstrous human form as he transformed himself through costume and makeup. Hybridity was achieved too through the use of new media, in which Cohen combined traditional performance art with digital technologies to create a unique work which placed emphasis on his spectacle (Ndalianis 2005:2 & De Villiers 2008:9). The hybrid was also established through the references to various cultures and social values. This form of hybridity creates excess as it produces ambiguity. Cohen uses his work to comment on current social values, particularly consumer culture and issues relating to body categorisation (De Villiers 2008:27 & Du Plessis [sa]:27).

Golgotha has an aesthetic of excess typical of the Neo-Baroque style, established through numerous references, the embracing of new digital media which assists the emphasis excess, and the manner in which the different narratives give a chaotic and incoherent impression. The abject is evident in Cohen's use of human skulls as heels; and his costumes, with their corsets

and stilettos, are seen as inappropriate within dominant society. This serves to transgress social boundaries relating to gender classification and establish excess typical of the Neo-Baroque (Calabrese 1992:59). The Neo-Baroque ultimately became evident through complexity, excess, and hybridity.

In Mntambo's *Europa* (Figure 20), hybridity was evident in the way she transformed her own body into an ambiguous, monstrous form that was part bull and part human. Such ambiguity of gender and species becomes abject and is exploited to establish excess, shown to be a typical Neo-Baroque approach to highlight social concerns. The work combines a variety of references through the title and the work itself. Mntambo makes use of traditional portraiture in combination with advances in digital technologies to create a unique artwork, so becoming an original form of image hybridisation (Darley 2000:86). Typical of the Baroque, dynamism is established through the action of a single figure which forms the core of the composition (Bazin 1968:103), in this case Mntambo's aggressive stance as a bull ready to charge. Typical of postmodern art, Mntambo makes use of self-reference to explore social concerns and to break the boundaries established to institute bodily values, forming a site of resistance. The emphasis on detail in the work creates a tactile effect, which contributes to the work's having the illusion of reality. The hybrid and Neo-Baroque finally are found in the work's complexities.

Vári's *The calling* (Figure 21) uses new media manipulation to transform and morph her own body. This creates ambiguity, which draws on the abject and excess through the transgression of social limitations on body classification. Hybridity is found in the transformation of her body into a monstrous, ambiguous shape resembling a gargoyle; such figures of monstrosity are typical of the Neo-Baroque (Calabrese 1992:59). Here, a hybrid new art form is created through the multiple references within the work as well as the use of digital media. Typical of postmodern art forms, the work makes use of the self to explore social concerns, which aligns with the Neo-Baroque and establishes excess through the transgression of social value systems relating to the body. There is an emphasis on detail which references various aspects of culture, again creating a complexity which may be seen as Neo-Baroque. The illusion of the work appearing real is created by the artist by using an actual environment and transforming her body into a fictive figure. New media is used to blur the boundaries between the appearance of what is real and what is fantasy, so creating a hybrid version of reality to question the reality of everyday life, a method distinctive of the Neo-Baroque (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]). The work ultimately reflects a hybridity which becomes evident through its complexity and places the work within a Neo-Baroque aesthetic of excess.

As in Latin America (Salgado 1999), this aesthetic is used in South Africa to establish a site of resistance around contemporary social concerns, but in this research, more specifically concerns relating to the body. Resistance becomes evident in different facets of hybridity. This manifests through a complexity composed of suggestions referencing different aspects of society, to reflect a hybrid society made up of various cultures and beliefs.

As in the case with Cohen, new media is seen as another effective way of achieving hybridity and complexity. The use of new media aligns with contemporary conditions within popular culture which emphasise spectacle (Ndalianis 2004:[sp]). In South Africa, the Neo-Baroque appears to be a new and alternative approach to addressing body politics through the application of such notions as the gaze, the abject and the erotic. The research shows that body politics of difference still exist in society and are prescribed by dominant social systems. Also, it seems that post-colonialism has not resolved these identity issues but merely re-inscribed and hidden them in society. This may be why artists are employing a Neo-Baroque aesthetic of excess as a means of shifting social boundaries and as an alternative approach to addressing these issues. Salgado (1999:322) notes that the Neo-Baroque can be seen as a 'creative mode in which old world styles are cultivated, mutated and developed into new world forms of expression'. This is most evident in the work of Cohen, Rose and Vári, where traditional performance art is combined with new digital media to create unique hybrid art forms. In Mntambo's work this is shown more in the manner that she has clearly referenced artworks by Baroque artists such as Caravaggio and represented them in a new way - in theme and representation as well as in medium. In some works like those of Hlobo, old traditions are referenced but placed within a contemporary context.

As is seen in the works of these researched artists, contemporary representations of the self are not always aimed towards establishing some essential truth about the individual (Schmahmann 2004:7). Instead, here the focus seems to be on the exploration of the multifaceted nature of identity, as well as how it is always in a process of construction (Schmahmann 2004:7). Schmahmann (2004:7) points out that this exploration of identities is firmly linked to and placed in relation to South Africa's complex social and political background. De Villiers (2008:5) further notes that this use of the body and performance within art can be seen to reflect current changes in society, adding that this performance type of art in particular is expressed as a communication linking parts of modern culture and personal beliefs (De Villiers 2008:17). In using their art to reveal concerns about current crises experienced by South Africans, artists are turning to spectacle to impact on their viewers (De Villiers 2008:9). The use of spectacle as a means to shock clearly supports the Baroque issue of excess. The Neo-Baroque may be best

identified here through excess which manifests itself in many ways, as well as through hybridisation.

The body has the ability to disturb society's ideas of identity, and artists exploit this possibility by using their own bodies in their works (Schmahmann 2004:7; Van der Watt 2004c:51). Here the artists stretch the boundaries which have been culturally placed upon the body, and so manage to disturb identity constructs by embracing 'difference, instability and incoherence' (Van der Watt 2004c:51). Their refusal to allow the body to conform to dominant expectations, and the tendency of the body towards excess is communicated particularly well through performance art. According to Jones (in Van der Watt 2004c:51) performance art and the use of the body offer a manner in which to specify the subject 'by exaggeratedly performing the sexual, gender, ethnic, or other categorisations of the body/self'. These artists emphasise the private and the specific through performance art, which makes use of the body as a tool in the reconstruction of identities (Van der Watt 2004c:51). The use of their own bodies in their performance is a powerful way to reconstruct their identities and to remove the self from social prescriptions that regulate identity (Van der Watt 2004c:51).

According to De Villiers (2008:25), both masquerade and photography have a resemblance to Baroque aesthetics, as both place emphasis on visual display and become a complex imitation. By engaging in exaggerated, excessive carnivalesque masquerade, these artists create shocking constructs and Neo-Baroque sensory aesthetics to engage and extract an emotional response from their audience (De Villiers 2008:9; Degli-Esposti 1996a:159). In most of the discussed visual examples, abject, erotic, and uncanny elements can be found in the work, since the artist transgresses social boundaries relating to the body, and these are used to provoke a reaction within the viewer and institute excess.

The study has shown how a number of South Africa artists who engage with a Neo-Baroque aesthetic in a search for answers to their own identities, generally use numerous approaches in view of a more inclusive examination of culture (Salgado 1999:320). In this process these artists reveal a sense of crisis, both on a personal level and from within a broader South African context. This uncertainty or sense of unease seems to arise from social and cross-cultural resentments lying beneath the surface. These are influenced largely by the political changes which have left many people feeling uncertain about the country's future and their place in it.

Cohen uses his body to question constructs relating to gender and sexuality. He also comments on society in general, consumerism and the contemporary way of life. Mntambo expresses concerns relating to gender and racial constructs, by turning her body into an aggressive animal-

like, even monstrous, form. Vári seems to reflect on the numerous changes that have happened in South Africa and the uncertainty it brings for its entire people, as well as for herself. According to Alexander (2011:38), unless the economic origin of social disparity installed by racial beliefs is dealt with, the racial order is merely recreated. This idea seems to be considered in the work of these artists, but they are expressing these concerns about sexuality and gender as well, revealing the sense of an identity crisis felt by them.

Although the formation of spectacle as a manner of establishing shock clearly retains elements of the Baroque aesthetic of excess, in the end it is through the numerous ways in which excess is formed that the Neo-Baroque can most likely be recognised. The Neo-Baroque genre seems to be an ideal way to challenge body constructs which have not been resolved, but merely camouflaged within dominant culture. As was clear from the work of the researched artists, this form of art making seems to be ideal for pushing boundaries in the hopes of rebuilding South Africa in a manner that is more inclusive and better reflects its multi-cultural composition.

5.2 Contribution and suggestion for further research

This study contributes to the understanding of contemporary art in South Africa, as it investigates current artistic practices which make use of Neo-Baroque aesthetics of excess. This mini-dissertation demonstrates that the Neo-Baroque art style can be found in contemporary South African art, and used as an alternative post-colonial approach for addressing body politics in South African culture. It has moreover shown that the Neo-Baroque is most evidently found through the use of the abject, erotic, and hybrid within the works which contributes to excess as it transgresses social boundaries and becomes a site of resistance.

The discovery of the Neo-Baroque style in South Africa will open up new research possibilities not only within the Fine arts but also in other fields of study such as music, drama and literature. It will give artists alternative ways to explore their subject matter and express their ideas through new approaches to art media, used to create innovative art forms. The consideration of the Neo-Baroque aesthetic as a postmodern art style allows for further investigation in regard to its impact on artists and their creative output, not only in South Africa but globally as well.

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