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## **Cloth as a membrane of the imagination in the artwork of Mary Sibande**

Patricia C. Henderson 

*Department of Anthropology, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa*  
Email: [P.Henderson@ru.ac.za](mailto:P.Henderson@ru.ac.za)

This paper brings future-orientated theories of becoming to bear on the work of artist Mary Sibande. Contemporary social theory is increasingly interested in how human life and matter join in vital forms of assemblage. In relation to Sibande's work in particular, I explore her sculptures and images in terms of the interplay between body, skin, cloth and the world. I suggest that these interminglings enable forms of transfer between inner longings and outer forms of actualisation, between experience and imaginative reach. Using cloth as a technology of the imagination, Sibande embodies critique and possibility in her work. The paper shows how the artist strives for a form of world-making that is not "a simple reaction to social and political conditions" (Eyene 2013) but a performative enactment of the possibility of living and imagining outside the constraints placed on black bodies under apartheid or narrow foreclosed colonial identities. The paper draws on theories of futurity and possibility, arguments about assemblages formed between matter and persons, and on notions of technologies of the imagination that conjoin matter and human skill.

**Keywords:** art as embodied ritual; becoming; embodiment; future-orientated theory; refashioning the self

### **Future-orientated theories and the refashioning the self**

My engagement with the work of South African artist Mary Sibande explores anthropologically how Sibande's creative process constitutes a form of embodied "ritual," refashioning the self in ways that have individual and social resonance. Such an understanding is augmented by an engagement with future-orientated theories of becoming, as well as theories that point to the intermingling of social and material life. Sibande is involved in processes that deploy the body, and its extension, through materials, gesture and movement — even as a mimetic figuration materialised through a photographic image or sculptural cast. Her art making, while encompassing the past, opens possibilities for the future.

Reflecting on the theoretical work of anthropologists Henrietta Moore and Elizabeth Povinelli enables an exploration of what is entailed in refashioning the self. Moore (2011, 13) writes of "the capacity of embodied experience and affective states to refuse and/or exceed social subjection and social constraint." To draw on an inversion of a psychoanalytic idea, her approach refuses a life lived through traumatic reiteration of the past, of "the same," and shifts the emphasis of critical engagement from a sole focus on what constrains lives to what enables "the new." Moore destabilises notions of emplacement, identity and culture. She suggests that the making of selves, social relations and social imaginaries involves both "being oneself and being beside oneself" in opening spaces for possibility. Being oneself and being beside oneself is an apt way of describing Mary Sibande's artwork in relation to its autobiographical facets. Her work, although recouping her family's history, utilises the past to bring into focus a form of aspirational dreaming that inverts traumatic capture.

In a similar vein to Moore, Povinelli explores Foucault's preoccupation with "insurrectional knowledge," aimed at undermining established forms of coherence. Foucault argues that dominant forms of coherence render invisible aspects of social life that cannot be contained within them.

Povinelli (2012, 454–455) draws on Foucault’s notion of the importance of “being otherwise” by linking it to the celebration of an attitude of wilful curiosity. Such processes involve both ethical reflection (*souci éthique*) and ethical practice (*travail éthique*). In Povinelli’s words, reflection is linked to “a kind of curiosity that permits one to cast off oneself (*déprendre de soi-même*) and become bewildered (*égarement*)” (456). I would suggest that Mary Sibande demonstrates similar forms of bravery and explorative risk in leaning towards the unknown in her creative work. For Foucault (1990a, 1990b, 2003, 2010), the undoing of the self through reflexive techniques and embodied practices creates a form of emergence beyond the habitual and engrained. In Povinelli’s (2012, 454) terms, the purpose of engaging with the self in such ways is to “capacitate modes of life.” I would argue that Mary Sibande’s processes of art making constitute reflexive, performative techniques in which versions of herself explore both the past and future possibilities.

Notions of identity that rely on a point of origin or authenticity and the idea of culture as preformed and unyielding cannot account for what Moore points out as increasing interest in self-stylisation, and the refashioning of selves through the body — performative enactments that lend themselves to autobiographical reflection. She writes, “processes of subjectification depend today on cultural diversity, cultural change, on borrowings, mimesis, identification and projection” (Moore 2011, 13). Borrowings, mimesis, identification and projection are precisely the processes embodied in Mary Sibande’s work.

### Human life, matter and the imagination

I now turn to how there is an increasing interest in contemporary theory in the ways in which human life and matter conjoin to form vital forms of assemblage, where constituent elements together have force (Bennett 2010). The term “vitalism” points to configurations of life and matter, the human and the non-human that, because of their specificities, create unforeseen potentialities (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). In relation to art, the philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (2008, 4) unsettles the often taken-for-granted boundary between human and natural worlds through drawing on the aesthetic, excessive sensory aspects of animal courting rituals and suggesting that art in both animal and human worlds “enables matter to become expressive, to ... intensify — to resonate and to become more than itself.” Through its configuration and staging of materials, art in the human world creates a framing, a plane of coherence and composition within the chaotic flow of life. Such framings form a temporal pause, a space for contemplation, in which to think and make (5). Grosz embeds the potential of surprise within such forms of excess. She gestures towards the capacity of life and matter to exchange with each other in processes of transformative becoming (7). In Mary Sibande’s work, I explore her excessive use of cloth and its transformatory capacities in relation to her own conception and reinvention of the self.

Regarding the vitality of matter, Tim Ingold asks us to attend to the performance of things. He shows how it is assumed that making entails the imposition of form on the material world. In contrast, he argues that the form of things arises within “fields of force and flows of material.” He likens making to weaving, in which “practitioners bind their own pathways or lines of becoming into the texture of material flows coming from the life-world” (Ingold 2010, 91, 2000). Ingold therefore stresses the comingling of human skills with the qualities of materials that together and through their mutual exertion of force create new hybridities. Forms emerge through the process of their creation and are not the outcome of a separate agent or a disembodied mind that predetermines their material manifestation prior to embarking on the process of making. In like manner, Deleuze and Guattari (2004, 451) describe processes where a carpenter may surrender to the qualities of specific kinds of wood through “following” where they lead — being “in tune” with their grain.

Echoing Moore’s and Povinelli’s work, David Sneath, Martin Holbraad and Morten Pedersen (2009, 24) argue that the imagination can become a defence against entrapment through precipitating a type of being that escapes determination. They examine the limited and

instrumental ways in which the imagination has been utilised within social science in general and within the discipline of anthropology in particular. On the one hand, they consider the notion of the social imaginary (Appadurai 1996; Taylor 2002) which, although attempting to incorporate social fluidity, is easily linked to a view of culture in which coherence persists. This is so in that the social imaginary replaces the centrality of explicit, shared meanings with implicit ones that describe a normative horizon against which fluidity finds its place. On the other hand, Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen caution against an overly romantic appropriation of the imagination, where its possible dystopian effects are ignored (see Strathern, Stewart and Whitehead 2006). Cornelius Castoriadis (1987, 168), to whom Sneath and his colleagues refer, shows how the imagination can be ethnographically explored through the *processes* and *technologies* that open it up. In the work of Mary Sibande, cloth and its moulding through the work of her hands become the technology of opening up her imagination to accommodate dreaming, aspiration and enlarged, hitherto unimagined ways of being.

Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen show how technologies of the imagination indicate a set of *relationships* between objects and persons. Ingold (1997, 108) argues that technology and culture are conjoined in skills, describing them as “embodied capacities of action and perception that people learn in the course of handling of everyday practical tasks throughout their lives.” He points to the way in which new uses for old things emerge through open-ended interaction with materials (119). He likens this process to a form of collage making, famously captured in Claude Lévi-Strauss’ (1966) term “bricolage.” In what follows, I will explore Mary Sibande’s embodied skills in an open-ended interaction with cloth and its qualities.

### Introducing the artist and her work

Mary Sibande’s sculptural and performative work is celebrated both within and beyond South Africa. She was the recipient of the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Visual Art in 2013 and has exhibited her work in many parts of the world. In October 2017, she received the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art’s Award for African Art. Born in 1982 in Barberton, Mpumalanga (then eastern Transvaal), South Africa, Sibande is the descendent of three generations of domestic workers. It is a history that she foregrounds and transcends through her work. Central to her practice is the use of her own body, casts of her body, and cloth fashioned into distinctive garments. It is the interaction between the body, and/or putative body in the form of a cast, with its repertoire of gestures — the prosthetic extension and work of the hand — together with cloth, which forms the core of my meditations on her work. I am interested in the mimetic transfer of qualities between skin and cloth. Sibande’s sculptures — in representing the play between body, skin, cloth and the world, as forms of transfer between inner longings and outer forms of actualisation, between experience and imaginative reach — constitute the linked forms of “vibrant matter” through which I wish to explore processes of refashioning the self in her work.

In the by now well documented exhibition *Long Live the Dead Queen*, exhibited at Gallery Momo in Johannesburg in 2009, Sibande took on the persona of an alter-ego, Sophie, a domestic worker, by clothing casts of her body in voluminous, often blue cloth (Eyene 2013). Sibande chose not to reduce the appropriation of her ancestresses’ history to formulaic accounts of limitation under colonial and apartheid forms of oppression. While not ignoring the devastating effects of South African history, she sought to depict her forebears’ emergent and often enduring strength, and the ways in which generational coherence was maintained despite the separation of families under apartheid. Sibande was involved in processes of humanisation and memorialisation in which the powerful affects of love, care, longing and aspiration were conjoined.

In *Long Live the Dead Queen*, Sibande gives her figures names: Sophie-Elsie when referring to her great-grandmother, Sophie-Merica to her grandmother, Sophie-Valucia to her mother and Sophie-Ntombikhayise to herself. The naming of her figures deliberately refers to colonial and apartheid naming practices that white employers applied to the African people they employed as

servants. From a position of power that enabled them to dictate the terms of engagement with their employees, many white employers claimed that local names were too difficult to pronounce and hence gave individuals stock names. The power to name and to withhold names in such a way, as well as an indifference to acquiring skills in local languages, constituted a dismissive violence made possible by unequal power relations within spheres of employment and governance, and rendered a person a “form of property,” in Sibande’s words (Eyene 2013).

The anthropologist Veena Das (2007) draws on John Austin’s (1975) theories about the harm or perlocutionary force that speech may inflict on addressees. Drawing on the *Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles*, Gabea Baderoon (2014, 173, 175) points out how the term “maid” was conflated with “black woman” and “servant” in South African English, inscribing servitude within the domestic sphere and underscoring the division of employer/employee along entrenched racial lines. During apartheid, the term maid, or *meid* in its original Afrikaans usage, and the ubiquitous use of the term “girl” in English carried disparaging implications that reduced all black women, irrespective of their actual positions in society, to a social position of servitude.

Despite the inbuilt forms of lack of recognition that underscore such naming practices, Alexandra Dodd (2010, 472), reflecting on Sibande’s work, draws attention to the fraught intimacies between employer and employee in spheres of domestic work within South Africa. Drawing on the acclaimed novel *Agaat* by Marlene van Niekerk (2006) and on Alison Light’s (2007) academic work, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants*, Dodd (2010, 472) stresses the sadomasochistic potentialities within emotionally charged domains of domestic work. She describes an affective landscape related to feelings of inferiority, envy, intimacy, deference and anger. A social history of domestic work in South Africa may be found in the work of Jacklyn Cock (1989) and Jennifer Fish (2006).

In *Long Live the Dead Queen*, Sibande’s figures reveal the mimetic and easily recognised characteristics of a maid’s uniform — the standard white apron and head scarf — with each garment made of durable fabric. In this series of works, the colours of the cloth — deep blue, dark green and khaki — and their strength and intensity register immediately as those used in the manufacture of workers’ uniforms. With the representation of each successive generation in the exhibition, the costumes of Sibande’s figures become more elaborate, as their dreams come closer to the possibility of fruition. Thus, while Sophie-Ntombikhayise’s outfits echo the “standard” maid’s uniform, the excessive amount of fabric with skirts that undulate across the floor and voluminous petticoats produces a form of “declarative” excess that echoes and amplifies Victorian dress. The use of broderie anglaise embroidery around collars and aprons in Sibande’s work destabilises the maid’s uniform from a sole focus on the South African location and creates a hybrid echo with maids’ uniforms from Europe. Dodd captures this by arguing that although Sibande’s work constitutes a highly charged appropriation of the Victorian dress, it exceeds any Victorian referent (Dodd 2010, 468; see also Corrigan 2015).

The element of excess was present in numerous works in the exhibition. In *Reign*, Sophie mounts a rearing horse, mocking and yet claiming male power in relation to colonial conquest. In *They Don’t Make Them Like They Used To*, she incorporates superman iconography in her knitting. In *I Put a Spell on Me*, Sophie brandishes the staff of an African male Zionist leader, in a pose that suggests religious ecstasy. In *Rubber Sole: Monument of Aspiration*, she appropriates the khaki dress and large whitewashed shoes of male Zionists and jumps uninhibitedly and with great force — an action expressly denied female Zionists but expected of its male practitioners. In another tableau, *I’m a Lady*, Sophie is seated in a decorous pose, holding up a white lace parasol, mirroring the leisure and “delicacy” of a woman of privilege, whose inactivity is necessarily undergirded by the provision of services by other women who as servants are rendered invisible. In all these configurations, the eyes of the figures are closed as if caught up in a state of reverie and dreaming. Indeed, the unequivocally enlarged scale and appropriation of male heroic iconography by the figures create a declarative space that is dream-infused and in which strength, majesty and aspiration are conjoined.

Let us consider how mimetic hybridity is linked to the capacity to dream, to playfulness and irreverence, and how such possibilities operate in Sibande's work. It was Walter Benjamin (1978, 333) who, in coining the phrase "the mimetic faculty," drew attention to our human compulsion to see resemblances and to seek to behave and become something else. Paul Stoller (1995) shows how colonised people, in attempts to gain some purchase over the power that colonisers exercised over them, imitated stock characters and forms of ritual associated with colonial authorities long after colonisation had ended.

In such ways, history becomes embedded in the sensory world of the body. In Stoller's (1995, 40–41) words, "Knowing is corporeal. One mimes to understand. We copy the world to comprehend it through our bodies." Michael Taussig (1993, 254) describes mimesis as a form of sympathetic magic that "grants one the power to act as if what one is mirroring is indeed real, to live in a different way." He goes on to argue that make-believe or the oneiric is a foundation of reality: although one may be shaped by the conditions in which one finds oneself, it is likewise possible to manipulate them and in this way reshape the real (255). In metamorphosing the maid's uniform and hybridising it with colonial dress, Sibande displaces the stranglehold of limited social positioning.

Sibande's early genealogical work makes visible the imagined dreams and aspirations of her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. In similar ways to Stoller's conjoining of bodily practice and historical memory, she speaks of her ancestresses' stories as an embodied inheritance, "a residue" within herself. In an interview, she remarked: "I am interested in the garment as part of the body, an extension of what happens inside it" (Eyene 2013). Her figures come to externalise inner longings. She is concerned with how clothing imparts dignity to a person, deliberately eschewing nudity in her work. Casts of her body staging the dreams of her ancestresses point to how their experiences have been internalised by herself. Yet from a post-colonial perspective, Sibande strives for a form of world-making that is not "a simple reaction to social and political conditions" (Eyene 2013). She insists on the possibility of living and imagining outside the constraints placed upon black bodies under apartheid or by narrow foreclosed colonial identities. Sibande's work allows for a fruitful double transgression, or a way of being otherwise, against and in relation to local patriarchies through the appropriation of "male" iconography and forms of racialised servitude instituted through colonialism and apartheid. Her work both pays homage to those who made it possible for her to be — to a female line of ancestry — and is a departure from forms of entrapment in servitude. The work of refashioning selves takes place through bodily enactments in relation to materials that produce a visual representation, or the concrete enactments of dreams and forms of metamorphosis.

In 2010, the projection of Sophie's image from *Long Live the Dead Queen* onto the sides of buildings in Johannesburg's city centre constituted an inversion of such violent forms of diminution inherent in the "sign" of a servant's uniform by giving Sophie-Ntombikhayise a hyper-visible and enlarged presence (for a reproduction of the image, see Sibande 2013a). Through the inflation, Sibande insists on the necessity and weight of care and its affective dimensions, even when painfully diverted away from one's own family to a dominant group. She reclaims the dignity and fortitude of her ancestresses in working to sustain their absent families, and in reinvigorating their dreaming and aspirational selves. The cityscape, having emerged largely through hegemonic, white, male capital and power, relegates day-to-day care to the domestic sphere at an invisible remove from the centres of business and commerce. Sophie's presence becomes especially powerful projected onto a cityscape whose encrusted topography, made up of streets and multi-storied buildings, take on phallic qualities.

Sophie, projected onto buildings, makes visible both the ongoing weight of domestic work, so often belittled and viewed as unimportant, as well as the humanity and strength of women who work within this sphere yet strive to live lives beyond its confines. There is something immensely gratifying about the insertion of the figure of Sophie within a cityscape: it constitutes a powerful



acknowledgement that the city's built environment cannot exist without reproductive care. Sophie's presence aesthetically underscores the ways in which inner-city Johannesburg has been reinvigorated, reappropriated and reinhabited by a largely African population, including many artists and designers like Sibande herself.

The scale of Sibande's images creates an unequivocal goddess-like presence, coupled with sainthood, feisty religiosity and playful triumph. The figure *Her Majesty, Queen Sophie* (for a reproduction, see Sibande 2010) is a case in point. In this image, Sophie is resplendent as the benign figure of a goddess with her palms facing upwards in a gesture of compassion and largesse. Her Victorian attire is augmented by a magnificent beaded necklace that spills in long strands onto the floor, each strand ending in a heavy cluster of beads, grounding the figure with an immovable power.

### The body's extension

Steven Connor's (2005) account of Michel Serres' work *Le Cinq Sens* (The five senses, 1998) augments my own view of Sibande's work. Serres insists on the body as excursive, displaying a vitalism that "refuses limit, suffering, degradation" and "exhaustion," as a vehicle celebrating "grace, gratuity, giving, expenditure" and "abundance" (Serres, cited in Connor 2005, 332). Sarah Nuttall (2014, 169) argues that Sibande seeks the body's reanimation, "no longer fixed by social symptomologies." Drawing on Anne Cheng's (2009) engagement with the performance work of Parisian cabaret artist Josephine Baker in the 1920s, Nuttall points out similarities between the polished figure of Josephine Baker, in which skin, hair and costume evince a flawless gleam, and the opaque quality of Sibande's casts and presentation of the own self in photographs. Here the skin becomes a prop, a costume, a form of ornamentation and cladding that seals off inner wounding. Nuttall concludes that there is ambiguity in Sibande's work between "fabric as matter and dress as ornament that symbolises surface." Artistic endeavour, then, is a way of changing the narrative about oneself in a process where changing surfaces are linked to the ability to change story (Nuttall 2014, 169).

### Of the hand

I draw attention to the gestural qualities in Sibande's work. I have described how Sophie, in the piece *I Put a Spell on Me*, holds the authoritative staff of the Zionist church in her left hand — the staff lending her an undeniable authority. She also extends her right arm to its full length with her hand warding off or stopping an unseen external force or presence. Putting a spell on "herself" is a means of amplifying her power and presence in the world. In *Reign*, Sophie grasps the reins of the horse, preventing herself from slipping off its back. She simultaneously assumes the authority of a conquering, military leader, the more usual subject of similar sculpture. In *Her Majesty, Queen Sophie*, both hands are turned upwards in a gesture of peace, at once open and giving to the world.

To my mind, hand gestures are intimately involved in an imaginative reach towards possibilities of being and living, of claiming authoritative occupation of the world, and at meeting its unfolding challenges. Michel Serres (cited in Connor 2005, 321) writes, "the hand in its gymnastics is involved in thought, contemplation, experience and the imaginary." The hand in motion constitutes "a flight of forms from possible to possible." The hand gestures of Sibande's figures provide those who contemplate her work with a concrete sense of how she wishes to occupy the world.

The gestural qualities of Sibande's sculptures and their contribution to a sense of reverie, dreaming and transcendence are linked to a practised efficacy within the processes through which Sibande makes her artworks. We can imagine her in the process of sewing garments together, experimenting with the undulating qualities of cloth and the experiential effects of the use of excessive quantities of cloth and startling intensities of colour. We can imagine her gathering together frothy netting in mountainous heaps, threading beads into long, meditative strands, and perhaps asking others to assist with the practised capabilities of their own hands. The art of sewing and plying the needle is a skill long associated with women, and indeed with forms of

reverie, dreaming and escape to an elsewhere from which onlookers are necessarily excluded. The uniform intervals between stitches, whether made by hand or its prosthetic extension of the sewing machine, inaugurate a steady rhythm within the process of creation, a rhythm in which one may escape. Sibande is taking part in such a rhythmic pursuit, externalising her forms of an elsewhere through her sculptures and through the alchemy or process of creation.

Serres writes of the possibilities of voyaging far beyond the body with the senses. He writes that the ear can be projected to the other side of the window in front of which one is standing. One can hold the ear “at a great distance from the body” where it “mingles with the shocks of the world” (Serres, cited in Connor 2005, 322). Implicit within an understanding of the reach of the senses is the idea of voyaging out. If we imagine the use of cloth in Sibande’s work as a putative skin reaching out into the world, its extensive voyaging far from the body’s confines suggests how it may both pick up influences from the external world and carry forms of longing into the world.

### Of skin and cloth

Bringing together skin and cloth as putative skin, we may again draw heuristically on Serres’ ideas. He writes of the way in which the world and body touch through the skin. The skin becomes a bridge of transfer between the inner body and the outer world, with sensual engagement flowing in both directions. In a line of thinking similar to that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), the body does not exist in a milieu or environment set apart from it. The line of inheritance between Merleau-Ponty and Serres is evident. Serres’ understanding of the inter-penetration of the person and the world is captured in two assertions: “I mingle with the world which mingles itself in me”; and “the skin intervenes in the things of the world and brings about their mingling” (Serres, cited in Connor 2005, 322). The skin, as a porous membrane, enables these forms of transfer. Serres (323) also argues that the idea of tissue, textile and fabric become a useful model of knowledge. This is because their porous nature suggests immediately being amidst the world rather than standing before it at a point of remove, as is often presumed in more positivist constructions of knowledge. Serres’ thinking resonates with contemporary post-humanist thought that brings together forms of life and matter in assemblages that exert force.

### New departures

In Mary Sibande’s more recent work, *The Purple Shall Govern*, she is photographed in fabric-encreatured and encrusted landscapes that emanate from her dress and body. Here the garment becomes a living thing, moving away from the past. By borrowing the idiom “the purple shall govern” from the context of the anti-apartheid struggle and applying it to her 2013 exhibition, Sibande conjoins historic memory with a continuing interest in colour symbolism. Here, purple becomes a way of marking both a rejection of past forms of oppression and the regal qualities associated with the colour. In one photographic image, *A Terrible Beauty is Born* (2013), Sibande is pictured holding onto her stomach from which long, coiling forms emerge and seem to slip across the floor. At the seams of her extended skirt rises a dense field of intertwining root-like structures, as if she were the epicentre of a pullulating world in which forms endlessly, and in close proximity to one another, give rise to one another. Sibande stands with strength within this sea of creations, seeming to delay the flood of forms issuing from her body by holding onto her stomach. Her right hand is open, with figures extending downwards from it, in a declarative gesture announcing and protecting the forms that are being born (for a reproduction of the figure, see Sibande 2013b). Her left hand, palm upwards, supports the underside of the emerging forms, as if she were guiding them into the world. These gestures seem to shepherd her creations into the external space. Yet, there is also a sense of disquiet. We may well ask whether these forms have taken on an uncanny life of their own, menacing towards the figure in their midst? Is there not also a degree of fear lurking in this teeming, inchoate and shadowy world? In an interview with Corrigan (2013, 45), Sibande speaks of how the image of *A Terrible Beauty is Born* rooted in her



memory of her grandfather who, as a young man, was badly wounded in the stomach but had to walk a long distance, holding onto his intestines, before reaching people who could help him. A man clutching onto his own intestines is a powerful and disturbing image, in which life and death are in close proximity.

In this image of shadowy reverie, remnants of Sophie's uniform detach themselves from her. A white scarf moves off her head as if blown away by the wind. Sibande becomes a conductor of creatures of her imagination that are taking form around her. Prolific rhizomatic shapes creep across the floor and onto the walls. The mood is sombre, the shapes subdued in shadow. The opaque blackness of photographic images of herself, as well as of body casts staged in installations, and the deep purple cloth employed in the construction of costume and creatures bathed in shadow contribute to the sombre mood. There is a dreamlike sense that Sibande could be overwhelmed by these unpredictable offsprings. It seems a visual depiction of the "not yet" self, careering off in unpredictable directions.

In her engagement with Foucault and his articulation of the ethics of care of the self, Povinelli conjoins possibilities of becoming with *parrhesia* or truth telling. She writes, "the truth teller must be willing to put herself at risk before she is able to create a new context or a content already authorized" (Povinelli 2012, 459; see also Foucault 2001). Although Sibande is using visual rather than spoken language, Povinelli's well-expressed idea gestures towards Sibande's bravery in attempting to become something unknown to herself, or to stand beside an already known version of herself, as Foucault and Povinelli advocate.

Reflecting on Sibande's later work, Nuttall (2014, 169) conjoins the possibility of nightmare, "where the interior exteriorises itself," with a refashioning of self. Likewise, in exploring Serres' positive celebration of the body's expansive potential and experiential, comingling with the world, Connor (2005, 333) points to its ultimate dissolution: "If the body is excursive, if its nature is to list or lean into the wind, to go out from itself, this advance is [also] into its own mortality."


## Conclusion

Mary Sibande reinvigorates her own and her family's experience and explores the qualities of cloth through embodied and performative processes of creation. In her work, cloth becomes a membrane of the imagination, a putative second skin reaching out into the world. Sibande has engaged profoundly with the undulating and textural qualities of cloth and with its intensities of colour. Through bringing together future-orientated theories of becoming that incorporate embodied ways of refashioning the self and the intersection of material and human agency, I suggest that Sibande's powerful sculptures and images have created new forms of visibility within the public domain. In her work, ways of being that were often submerged and diminished by those in power under colonialism and apartheid are recuperated and enlarged in celebratory ways. Her works are also a means of venturing into the unknown, into explorative representations of the self and of becoming new.

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## ORCID

Patricia C. Henderson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7166-2496>

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