

MY HART KRY



SWAAR

Reconsidering patriarchy through queer abstraction, phenomenology and the haptic

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My Hart Kry Swaar

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DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Signed by candidate

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Abstract

My Hart Kry Swaar consists of an exhibition of sculpture, print, sound, and an explicatory document. The research project explores how the physicality of working with materials such as clay, wood and felted wool centre the body and movement as having the potential to release and process latent traumatic experiences and memories. The body-focused methodologies employed in producing the work include sculpting organic forms, wedging clay, impression moulding parts of my body, mark making and performance; all of which foregrounds the presence and absence of human touch.

Conceptually the artwork and text critically engage with the pervasive influence of patriarchal ideology, specifically from a queer and personal perspective, contextualised within Afrikaner culture in South Africa. Key theoretical concerns include queer abstraction, narratology, phenomenology, hapticity and kinship, which highlight the need for envisioning alternatives to patriarchal masculinity.

The role of tactile engagement with materiality, impermanence and strategies of queer abstraction are foregrounded in resisting binary and heteronormative classification, as well as imagining new narratives of desire and belonging. The project is situated within the fluctuating temporal boundaries of queer narratology, referencing theorists such as Florian Zitzelsberger, Sara Ahmed, Jack Halberstam, David Getsy, José Esteban Muñoz, Laura Berlant, and Kath Weston to investigate the relational complexities between the self, biological family, and queer chosen family.

Both the practical and theoretical components of the project foreground the importance of queer narratives and fostering safe communities in order to resist and re-imagine existing hegemonic narratives around intimacy and the body.



Waar om te begin?¹

What happens to the energy of attachment when it has no designated place? To the glances, gestures, encounters, collaborations, or fantasies that have no canon? As with minor literatures, minor intimacies have been forced to develop aesthetics of the extreme to push these spaces into being by way of small and grand gestures.

— Laura Berlant, *Intimacy: A Special Issue*

This document serves as a reflection on *My Hart Kry Swaar* by establishing a theoretical and visual framework to contextualise my practice. Therein, I foreground the ways in which my personal experiences inform my modes of production. Through an exploratory line of enquiry rather than an argumentative one, I discuss central themes such as queerness, memory, the body, intimacy and family. In *Part I: Moenie Huil Nie² – Hypernorms in South Africa*, I discuss the pervasive influence of patriarchal ideology from a queer and personal perspective, contextualising it within Afrikaner culture in South Africa. I view the Afrikaans titling of my work and sections in this text as a personal reclamation of a language

¹ Translates to 'Where to start?'

² Translates to 'Don't cry'.

³ Translates to 'Digging old cows out of the ditch' and is an Afrikaans idiom that I have heard countless times. It refers to the raising of past painful experiences and grievances, often while in conflict with someone over differences that were previously laid to rest.

in which I have experienced innumerable instances of patriarchal violence. The phrases and idioms are engrained in my memory and as such, evoking them here has been a difficult yet rewarding endeavour. I frame the project within institutional, interpersonal and intrapersonal models or "zones of familiarity," as theorist Lauren Berlant terms them. The damaging effects of heteropatriarchy within these zones are discussed through specific reference to bell hooks' *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. Key themes of weight, absence and touch are established and expanded on in *Part II: Ou Koeie Uit die Sloot Grawe³ – Visual strategies for encountering memory*.

The discussion will cover key elements of three artist's practices and how their thinking connects to my project. After establishing a basis for the area of research, *Part III: Ek is nogsteeds lief vir jou⁴ – A body focused approach to trauma and queer community*, maps out the conceptual and visual aspects of my own practice. Key theoretical concerns include queer abstraction, narratology, phenomenology, hapticity and kinship. These theoretical underpinnings are structured in both this document and the body of work through an interest in relationality. As a result of this interest, I delineate the sections in Part III according to my understanding of the stages of an intimate embrace: *Proximity, Navel to Navel, Felt/Veld* and *Ephemera*. In this way, I start to make sense of the unintelligible and fluid language of queer subjectivity in my practice. I engage with various visual and theoretical strategies to challenge heteronormative narratives of desire, intimacy and belonging. In this way, I highlight the need for envisioning alternatives to hegemonic and patriarchal masculinity, systemic gender

⁴ Translates to 'I still love you'.

inequality and the violence inextricably linked to these power structures.

These sections explore how the physicality of working with materials such as clay, wood and felting wool centre movement as having the potential to release and process latent traumatic experiences. The body-focused methodologies employed in producing the work include sculpting organic forms, wedging clay, impression moulding parts of my body, mark making and performance, all of which foreground the presence and absence of human touch.

The resulting exhibition consists of several works installed throughout the gallery spaces with particular attention to lighting. These include a large-scale, handmade wooden table; a sound recording from a performance; a series of ceramic constructions arranged on modified found domestic objects; a composition of felted assemblage objects attached to lashed and modified wooden rods; and a seven-meter-long abstract print created with my body, clay and graphite powder.



Part I: Moenie Huil Nie – Hypernorms⁵ in South Africa

⁵ The term is used by Visagie and Pretorius in a 1993 law article entitled, The ideological structure of the minority rights discourse in South Africa. “The elevation of the practice of patriarchy to a position of hegemony in South African society, can be described as the birth of a so-called ‘hypernorm’ (Visagie & Pretorius, 1993:54).

To end male pain, to respond effectively to male crisis, we have to name the problem.

—bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*

It is within the naming and subsequent analysis of “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” that *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* by prolific visionary feminist theorist, bell hooks, garners its significance to my research. Although the positionalities from which hooks and I consider the impact of patriarchy are vastly different, her anecdotal and intimate writing about familial dynamics resonate deeply. Her writing is from an intersectional, Black feminist perspective, and in the case of *The Will to Change*, she speaks of her own experiences of patriarchal violence within an American socio-political context. In order to contextualise my experience of patriarchy as hooks defines it, I am interested in how apartheid shaped and continues to shape ideologies of hegemonic⁶ masculinity within the Afrikaner culture in

which I was raised. Between 1948 and 1994, “Afrikaner nationalist governments used their political power to popularize new conceptions of masculinity” (Morrell et al., 2012: 16) which were regarded at the time as the cultural ideal. This racialised and classist ideal, maintained through a “synergy between religious, political and cultural leadership in Afrikanerdom” (Morrell et al., 2012: 16), continues to defend and reproduce this form of hegemony today. The puritan values and rigid codes of conduct that were foundational to constructing this version of masculinity during apartheid have greatly impacted the standards and expectations I am confronted with as a queer Afrikaans person in the present.

7 I specify the hegemonic nature of masculinity here as it analyses power relations within male hierarchy. This is pertinent in relation to the South African context my work is situated in, where colonialism and apartheid created an enduring political and economic divide along lines of race and social class (Morrell et al., 2012: 12).

The heteronormative pressure to ‘fit in’ during my youth derived from various formal and social structures. This includes attending a single-sex boys’ high school and sermons at the NGK⁷ church with my family, all of which pervaded my time at home, with peers, friends and subsequently an inner dialogue that I continually re-frame.

Patriarchal ideology has permeated various social spheres and intersects with other forms of oppression such as racism, classism and homophobia. To expand on how these socio-political issues manifest within a South African context, I have identified three relational models. The effect of patriarchy on institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dynamics will serve as a framework through which hooks’ key points are discussed.

7 The ‘Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk’ is known as the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). “In 1921, the DRC started an official study on the question of race...In a conference of the DR churches, segregation was supported, but it was called ‘separate development’ and supposedly would be beneficial to all” (Waardenburg, 2022). In many ways the NGK played a significant role in upholding the systems of apartheid.

8 Bradshaw has written extensively on relationship dynamics. hooks draws on his text *Creating Love* in order to expand on how harmful patriarchal ideologies affect men, women and children within varied social and institutional spheres.

Institutions of knowledge production and dissemination such as the church and education system are noted as spaces in which the principles of patriarchy are taught and reinforced (hooks, 2004: 27). hooks references psychotherapist John Bradshaw’s⁸ assertion that most school systems are still governed by the rules of patriarchy. This holds true for me as homophobia, racism and sexism were commonplace during my brief time at an all-boys high school. Bradshaw goes on to state that patriarchy is built on the foundation of thoughtless obedience that suppresses individual will in order to adhere to an authority figure’s way of thinking. He proposes that the widespread acceptance of the “supremacy of the father...in both domestic and religious functions...” (hooks, 2004:30) factors in the often-violent ways men relate to the women, romantic partners and children in their lives.

century, one doesn't have to look far to read about the disturbing reality of initiation in men's residences in schools and universities⁹, church and state driven transphobic legislation or the disproportionate discrimination against women and queer individuals within the workplace. This is not to say that there hasn't been tireless and impassioned resistance to the systems of oppression that continue to affect predominantly disenfranchised people of colour in South Africa¹⁰.

The often-violent dissemination of Western Christianity through colonisation has also played a significant part in laying the foundations for the systemic gender inequality and homophobic sentiments that factor into the specific patriarchal structures I discuss. The term 'patriarch' as

father and ruler has biblical origins¹¹ and was deployed to validate patriarchy's idealised objectives. Scripture from the Bible is utilised through eisegesis to reinforce predetermined roles of leadership to men and subservient roles of support to women (Coetzee, 2001: 301). Bible scriptures are also misinterpreted and weaponised against the queer community — bigotry that has at times severely impacted my sense of self. Coetzee argues that institutionally entrenched patriarchal values regulate human behaviour to the extent that it almost becomes a "pseudo-religion, according to which the final ideological destination is in line with the will of God" (Coetzee, 2001: 301). The unequal power dynamic these institutional ideologies create are implicated in fostering racism, classism and homophobia in South Africa.

Strategies of interpersonal violence that reinforce patriarchal indoctrination is a key theme throughout *The Will to Change*. According to hooks, the most common form of patriarchal violence occurs between parents and their children. It is through "practices of subjugation, subordination, and submission" (hooks, 2004:31) that a 'dominator model' is established. The corporal punishment my brother and I experienced as children aligns with this model. hooks states that within this framework, instances of abuse and violence towards women and children are equated to power and privilege. She continues by stating that this violence is also profoundly damaging to the emotional well-being of the men (and although less frequently, the women) who enact it. It is "through the unspoken rule in the culture as a whole that demands we keep the secrets of patriarchy, thereby protecting the rule of the father" (hooks, 2004:31) that this system is maintained.

In *South African education and the ideology of patriarchy*, Free State based academic Danielle Coetzee echoes these sentiments, stating that "the school, the church and the workplace are still regulated by the hypernorm of 'the superiority of the male sex'" (2001: 302). Although this article was written at the beginning of the twenty first

⁹ See article by Marianne Thamm titled *Wounds of the father: the Stellenbosch legacy of trauma*, for more information. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2024-02-04-wounds-of-the-father-the-stellenbosch-legacy-of-trauma/>

¹⁰ The #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall protests that occurred in universities across South Africa between 2015 and 2016 generated discourse around these shifts and efforts for a more equitable society. Although it is beyond the scope of this document to discuss the many factors that comprises the continued struggle for decolonisation and broader access to education and equitable employment, it is pertinent to acknowledge that community and collective imagination is a powerful force for navigating social transformation.

¹¹ Coetzee specifies that patriarch coming to mean 'the father and ruler of the family and tribe', was used in biblical context to refer to the sons of Jacob, (as well as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and their forefathers).

This example of intrapersonal pain is relevant both to my project, which concerns the manifestations of male anger and violence as maintaining patriarchal ideology, and to the personal consequences that are the culmination of this conflation of power and abuse. Boys and men are expected to “become and remain emotional cripples” (hooks, 2004:33) to adhere to the rules of patriarchal society. This absence of the emotive self occurs when “we force them to feel pain and to deny their feelings” (hooks, 2004:30). hooks states that this system of separation destabilises the mental wellbeing of men (2004:35), and as a result, those around them. It has manifested for me as often experiencing disproportionate amounts of guilt and anxiety, greatly impacting my ability to handle conflict without shutting down.

Family therapist and writer Terrance Real distinguishes between physical violence and the damage we all befall under patriarchal domination, which occurs in our psyches (hooks, 2004:36). Real argues that psychologically, patriarchy affects everyone, including the men that perpetuate and maintain its rule. The pervasive nature of this harmful ideology necessitates change in a multitude of ways. Through personal experience, this project aligns with hooks’ call to “envision alternatives to patriarchal masculinity” (2004:37) to bridge the relational rifts discussed above.

In this regard, I offer a queer perspective on the invasive impact of psychological patriarchy¹² as it is often expressed in White South Africa¹³, where both physical and emotional damage is enacted against vulnerable and marginalised communities. Adjunct Associate Professor of Public Law at the University of Cape Town, Melanie Judge, succinctly describes how hegemonic masculinity operates:

The othering of nonconforming sexual and gender identities and expressions has helped heterosexuality to secure its dominant status, through the devaluing of LGBTI people. Similarly, whiteness continues to assert its superiority premised on the diminishment of blackness, and heteromale entitlement remains reliant on the subordination of women, trans and gender-nonconforming people. (2021: 123)

¹² Terrance Real describes psychological patriarchy as the “dynamic between those qualities deemed “masculine” and “feminine” in which half of our human traits are exalted while the other half is devalued.” Both men and women participate in this tortured value system.” (hooks, 2004: 37).

¹³ Although Patriarchal violence is present in all South African cultures, I am responding from my own experience of Afrikaner culture, not as it may manifest in other social contexts. Morrell proposes that at least three hegemonic masculinities, “a “white” masculinity (represented in the political and economic dominance of the white ruling class); an “African,” rurally based masculinity that resided in and was perpetuated through indigenous institutions (such as chiefship, communal land tenure, and customary law) and finally a “black” masculinity that had emerged in the context of urbanization and the development of geographically separate and culturally distinct African townships” (Morrell et al., 2012: 12).

The subtle and overt patriarchal violence as outlined in the relational theories presented by Morrell, Judge, Coetzee, and hooks’ illustration of how psychological patriarchy can impact societal spheres, are a foundation on which to locate my practice within the socio-political landscape of South Africa. Through the practical and theoretical development of the project, three prevalent themes are identified: the conceptual weight of suppressed emotions, the presence and absence of the body, and the queer potential of the haptic and the unfamiliar to destabilise heteronormativity. Part II expands on these themes and contextualises my discussion on patriarchal ideology within an art-historical visual field.

Part II: Ou Koeie Uit die Sloot Grawe –
Visual strategies for encountering memory



Anger is the best hiding place for anybody seeking to conceal pain or anguish of spirit.

—bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*

When I sense that the tension, heavy as the air before a thunderstorm, will break into conflict, I feel a knotting twist grip me from within. That car-over-a-speedbump burst of nausea is followed by my limbs becoming leaden and a tightening of my jaw. The severity of the fight is inconsequential, for the bodily response is consistent.

To say that which has been left unsaid, I engage with the anger and conflict I was exposed to and implicated in as a child. Although I cannot speak on the behalf of the adults that formed part of my upbringing, I believe latent trauma has heavily contributed to the unhealthy conflict my body still remembers and reacts to. Whether purposely repressed or unconsciously suppressed, this trauma may lead to aggressive or violent behaviour (hooks, 2004:19). Excavation is explored in my practice as a potentially transformative strategy for engaging with my anxieties and somatic responses to loud or aggressive conflict. My thinking around this concept is informed by expressive art therapist, Daria Halprin.

I am interested in the Freudian metaphor of analytic process as “archaeological excavation”, which Halprin describes as “approaches in which creative encounter with memory allows us to work through the disturbances in our daily lives” (Halprin, 2009:41). Building on the idea of encountering memory, excavation informs both the conceptual and material components of my project. It has led to a non-chronological and creatively frenetic way of engaging with my own repository of memories, where my experiences of queerness and patriarchal violence become blurred, stretched and conflated. It has also informed the importance of materiality within the project. The various processes inherent to working with clay generated many conceptual

linkages to the fluidity and porosity of the body and mind. Here, the connections between clay, which comes from the earth, suppressed memories and the Freudian metaphor of archaeological excavation are evident. Through establishing the conceptual and material connections between clay and processing traumatic memory, the performance *Becoming an Image* (figure 1) by transgender Canadian artist Cassils becomes relevant for discussion.



Figure 1¹⁴



Figure 2

In *Queering Identity: being and becoming queer*, author Dr Cath Lambert describes the durational live performance in which Cassils “seeks to move beyond their specific body as the focus of attention and instead offers their body and abstracts from it, using the media of

still photography” (2017:22). The performance takes place in front of an audience, where the sporadic flash of a digital camera is the only light through which the audience watch them aggressively attack a human sized mass of modelling clay. The flash is used to create a series of “ghost” after images imprinted onto the retinas of the audience. I am interested in the ephemeral nature of these flashing images and how they pertain to the subjective and shifting nature of memory.

Reading Cassil’s work through hooks’ writing on anger has been essential in understanding patriarchal violence through a queer lens. There are also visual intersections between their performance and work I had already produced before looking into their practice. The performance and the cast of the resulting beaten mass of clay (figure 1 and 2) speak to “the abject, marginalised, unintelligible body, in a state of confusion and becoming” (Lambert, 2017:24), which could be applied to the engagement with the irrepresentability of trauma in both their work and my own.

hooks identifies one of the contributing factors to the prevalence of violent crimes committed against queer bodies as the suppression of the emotional self. She states that the anger concealed by the “anguish of spirit” (hooks, 2004:19) is caused by severing the link to this vulnerable self-hood.

Throughout *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love*, words such as rupture, disconnect, missing, self-betrayal and deny are used to express the trauma boys and men undergo when cutting themselves off from their emotions to conform to prescriptive gender roles. This profound loss has led to the exploration of absence and presence as concepts. In Cassil’s *The Resilience of the 20%* (figure 2), the traces of their violent actions on the ‘body’ of clay are made poignant to me through their absence. Although I had not known of it at the time, Cassil’s performance and methodologies share similarities with *Ek is nog steeds lief vir jou*¹⁵, a performance where I grapple with the physical and conceptual weight of the patriarchal figure, in which I use clay and graphite powder on paper.

The resulting marks ‘imprinted’ from my body and the clay onto the paper are reminiscent of the palimpsestic after-images created by the harsh flash in Cassil’s work.

I draw further analogies with the work of Doris Salcedo, who also examines the nuances between societal trauma and the absence of the body as exemplified through her use of chairs in the work *Noviembre 6 y 7* (figure 3). In *Presenting Absence: The Work of Doris Salcedo*, art director and curator Julie Rodrigues Widholm describes Salcedo’s work as, “equal measure poetic and political, the work...explores the paradox of simultaneously forgetting and remembering the social scars of violent conflicts” (2015:17). Rather than a representation of violent acts, the sculptural works are concerned with the struggle for presence, visibility, and the agency of those who have been affected by specific instances of socio-political violence (Widholm et al., 2015:20).

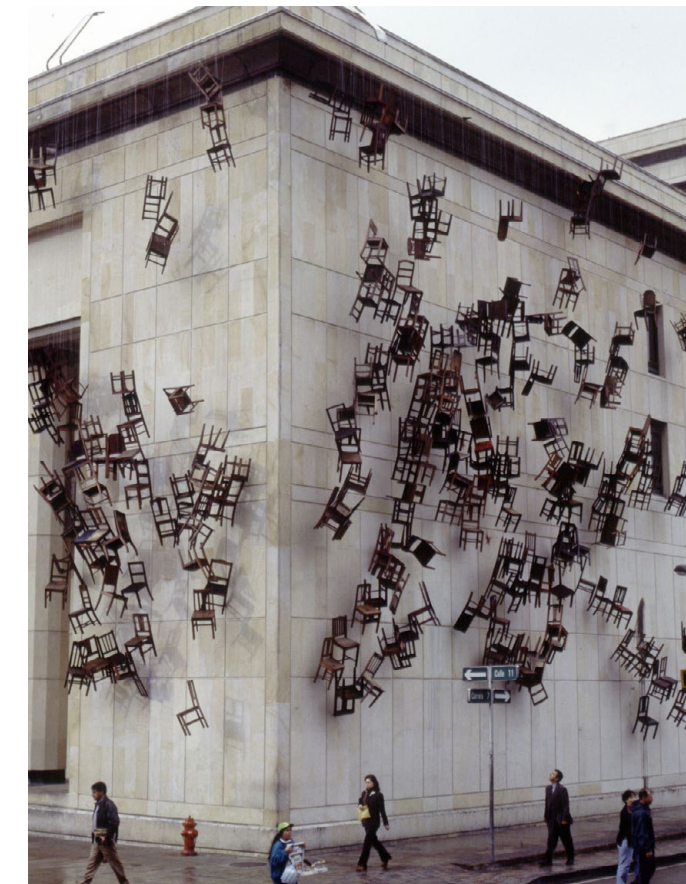


Figure 3

17 ¹⁵ This performance is further discussed in the eponymously titled third part of the document.

;In 2002, Salcedo installed an ephemeral, site specific public memorial to the 1985 siege and ensuing massacre at the reconstructed Palace of Justice in Bogotá, Columbia. According to Lori Cole, *Noviembre 6 y 7* “sought to measure the scale and duration of the siege” (2011:88) where for fifty-three hours (the length of the attack), two hundred and eighty wooden chairs were slowly suspended from the building in correlation to the number of victims of the attack. Although Salcedo refers to patriarchal violence that is politically driven, her use of wooden chairs that read as domestic objects and the notable absence of the human body speaks to the same intangible cost of patriarchal violence that my project is concerned with. Although she does not represent violence directly in this work, the precarity and vast number of the suspended chairs where one would least expect them, evoke a sense of unease.

The chairs tumble down the walls of the building as if thrown in a rage. Standing below and looking up, the silent tension created between the viewer and seemingly innocuous chairs are to me connotative of the threat of violence within the home. This threat is evident in Salcedo’s installation, where “familiar household elements used in everyday life become spectres of the familiar, suggesting transformations that occur when one’s life is irrevocably altered” (Widholm et al., 2015:22). This transformation speaks to the loss of life through violence, which is emphasised by the absence of the human figure in *Noviembre 6 y 7*. Similarly, *The Resilience of the 20%* by Cassils represents violence by alluding to the touch and subsequent absence of the body. There are resonances between my work and their nuanced yet evocative engagement with representations of trauma and memory.

Having looked at the absence of the body, I became interested in the subversive presence of the unfamiliar/abstracted body. Through a discussion on Harry Dodge’s *Consent-not-to-be-a-single-being* series (figure 4), haptic¹⁶ exploration and queer inhumanism became relevant considerations to challenging patriarchal hypernorms. According to queer theorist Jack Halberstam¹⁷, Dodge’s work “partakes wholeheartedly and joyfully in the haptic while performing a practice given over to humor, hybridity, and exploration of the unnameable” (2018: 90). In an interview, Dodge identifies what he means by the unnameable as “anti-authoritarian leakage, overflow, and profusion” (Halberstam, 2018: 90).

¹⁶ In her book *Touch*, theorist Laura Marks describes the haptic as “a visual erotics that offers its object to the viewer but only on condition that its unknowability remain intact, and that the viewer, in coming closer, give up his or her own mastery.” (Marks, 2002: 20)

¹⁷ Halberstam wrote about Dodge’s work in *Trans* A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* in 2018.



Figure 4

I am interested in the potential disruptions, ideological leakages and shifts caused by reading my own work as operating within the realm of the haptic. Through analogies to Dodge's practice, paying attention to the ways materiality and form link my sculptures and how they might interact with each other in the space became important considerations. Halberstam poignantly reflects on the queer effect these sculptures produce together during an online lecture for NYU Florence. He asks the viewers to imagine the works as a group of gender variable people in relationship to each other, where their bodies are inscribed with meaning in relation to each other rather than the fictive male/female binary (Halberstam, 2017). In Part III I will elaborate on the potential this project holds for reinterpreting the gendered body.

In *Aesthetic Inhumanisms: Toward an Erotics of Otherworlding*, art writer Rizvana Bradley echoes the importance of presenting alternative forms of embodiment to challenge normative thinking. She draws from queer theorists that frame queer inhumanism as the staging of an encounter rather than a fixed assertion of identity. I view the "queer matter of encounter and queer mattering as encounter" (Bradley, 2017: 202) as a theoretical framework to contextualise the unfamiliar body as it manifests in my project.

The relevance of memory and the absence/presence of the body in the works presented by Cassils and Salcedo are central to my discussion as they pertain to the discourse surrounding trauma and the body. Dodge's practice and the queer theories articulated by Halberstam and Bradley guided my navigation of new embodiments that challenge and decentralise the patriarchal viewpoint. Through engaging with memory, the body, hapticity, and queer inhumanism, I explore strategies to disrupt systemic gender inequality and the violence that accompanies it.



Part III: Ek is nogsteeds lief vir jou –
A body focused approach to trauma
and queer community

This section focuses on the importance of subjective narrative and physical proximity. As a verb, to approach is to draw closer and more known to someone or something else. As a noun, it is to deal with a situation or problem in a specific way. As previously mentioned, my approach to this project is based on queer subjectivity as a perspective from which to excavate and process personal patriarchal trauma.

This approach was further developed in reading *Metalepsis and/as Queer Desire: Queer Narratology and the 'Unnatural'* by Florian Zitzelsberger. She defines metalepsis “as a transgression of narrative levels, a violation of textual borders” (Zitzelsberger, 2020: 79), framing it as “the movement between subworlds, jumps between parallel worlds (also across textual borders), impossible blends, or my own formulation of metalepsis as an objection to normative modes of storytelling” (Zitzelsberger, 2020: 79). As the various practical components of my project developed, I realised that the impetus of the work lay in the slippages, tensions and dialogues between the ‘subworlds’

I fashioned out of clay, unrefined sheep’s wool, found objects, wood and paper.

The abstracted form the work has taken on reflects “metalepsis as unbound, far away from mimetic regulations of legibility and intelligibility” which in turn alludes to “various alternative ways of being, (be)longing, and feeling” (Zitzelsberger, 2020: 79). I offer the following non-chronological and fragmented recollections as an approach to the reader, a means through which to become more known. Here I foreground moments which have, at different times, served as catalysts for the development of the project:

Standing on a chair to open the cupboard, grabbing the Illovo syrup bottle and crawling underneath the dinner table. Gulps of viscous, numbing liquid coat my mouth and throat. A loving embrace from my parents as they see me off at the airport. Heavy silences before family meals, a prayer, “Seen Here wat ons eet, laat ons nimmer U vergeet, Amen¹⁸”. A hunting trip (did I join that time or did I imagine it?) where the barbed wire fence was punctuated by tufts of dirty wool. A slap through the face one New Year’s Day, a golden earring connects us. A separation that didn’t last. The elated laughter from a shared meal with my queer chosen family¹⁹. A late-night reconciliatory conversation with him. A frigid morning in the Eastern Free State, a palpable tension that culminates in a self-inflicted threat. He speeds off, his phone dead. Hours spent looking for him. A panic attack and furious prayer on a fucked-up dirt road. A phone call from my brother. Relief and Anger mixed in quantities I’ve never experienced. Seeing him sobbing for the second time in my life. Like wise-men we travel to visit him in Bethlehem. Receiving an orange and black beanie he crocheted for me during group therapy. A grey period. Meals and laughter with mamma, pappa and boetie. A day of rest.

¹⁸ This prayer translates to, ‘Lord bless the food we eat, may we never forget you, Amen.’

¹⁹ The popularisation of the term ‘queer chosen family’ in academic discourse is accredited to American anthropologist Kath Weston. The term was used in a 1991 text entitled *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*.

Proximity

Drawing analogies between flesh and clay, I look at how abstraction is integral to both my process and final work, and its potential for re-framing the negative perceptions I hold of myself after the consistent body-shaming I experienced as a queer youth. I also discuss the ways in which phenomenological theory has aided me in developing a deeper personal connection to my body and practice.

The lack of intimacy encouraged by patriarchy (hooks, 2004) that I experienced as an overweight, queer child, was continually inscribed by family and peers as shameful or off putting. As a result, I was alienated from my body and spent many years actively attempting to hide it from myself and others. I resonate with Lauren Berlant asking why "...the queers, the single, the something else can become so easily unimaginable, even often to themselves. Yet it is hard not to see lying about everywhere the detritus and the amputations

that come from attempts to fit into the fold..." (1998: 286). This project has, in part, become an exercise of 'self-imagining' which has manifested as a series of clay constructions (figure 5). They become evocative gestures which encourage a visceral engagement when experienced in relation to the viewers own body. On this mode of engagement, Professor David Getsy asserts that abstraction can avoid, circumvent, or delay the visual consumption of the immediately recognizable or readily legible...Abstraction can be one means to resist the cultural marking of the human body. This is a mode of defence, to be sure, but it is also fuelled by an embrace of openness and the not-yet-known. (2019: 67)

Figure 5



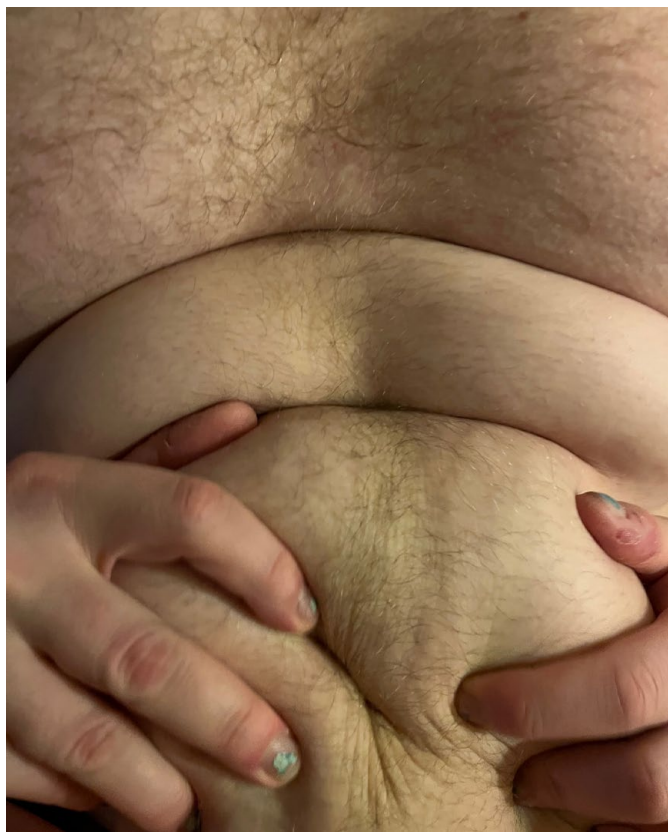


Figure 6

This visual delay also occurred while taking reference photographs for my sculptures (examples of which can be seen in figures 6 and 7). These abstracted, closely cropped photos of the folds, protrusions, planes and contours of my queer, assigned male at birth body offer me a different way of looking at the familiar forms I have grown accustomed to.

In terms of understanding phenomenology, the writing of Sara Ahmed provides new insight regarding the interplay between my practice, the viewer and myself. In the isolation of the studio, the work produced became introspective. The drawings, clay sculptures and body impressions reflect on how I have and continue to emotionally and physically perceive myself. As others began to engage with my constructions, the importance of the haptic became apparent. I observed a notable desire in those who came into contact with the works to tactilely explore their smooth and curved surfaces.

Figure 7



Touch has become a strategy through which the viewer is invited to participate in a sensory “model of knowing and perception that is not oriented toward mastery, not deployed simply at the level of the visual” (Halberstam, 2018: 90).

The relevance of the haptic model to the project will be further elaborated upon in the following sections. The conceptual potential of a physical engagement between sculpture and viewer relates back to phenomenology²⁰, as Ahmed asserts that “bodies as well as objects take shape through being oriented toward each other, as an orientation that may be experienced as the cohabitation or sharing of space.” (2006: 552). This phenomenological taking of shape interests me; how does the physical and emotional touch of others fundamentally alter the ways we relate to and perceive ourselves?

²⁰ In *Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed provides a specification to phenomenology that has proven useful to my research. She “takes up the concept of orientation to put queer studies into a closer dialogue with phenomenology” (Ahmed, 2006: 543). In relating queer theory and a discussion on body-focused phenomenological research, Ahmed provided me with thought provoking examples of how my work could function within this framework.

As this question is posed in the context of a social system constructed through hegemonic patriarchal ideology, I believe that self-hood is in part shaped by psychological and physical violence. These influences are myriad and vary, reflecting personal experiences such as Afrikaner ideals of masculinity, corporal punishment and homophobic rhetoric taught in religious institutions, as mentioned in Part I. These forms of violence have influenced how I view my body in relation to shame, guilt, pain, femininity and mental well-being. As my notions of sexuality developed, the relationship I had with my body was further complicated by the socially ‘desirable’ bodies of chiselled and muscular men that adorned the covers of popular magazines such as *Men’s Health* and the thumbnails of gay porn sites.

In reaction to the heteronormative classification queer bodies are subjected to, I began sculpting intuitively instead of analytically. Getsy outlines that queerness, “is better understood as tactically adjectival. It simultaneously performs an infectious transmutation and declares an oppositional stance. Necessarily, its uses and contours shift in relation to the ways in which normativity is constantly and covertly reinstalled, redeployed, and defended.” (2019: 65) Defiantly, I revel in the gravitational pull of corpulent clay folds, the familiar fleshiness of the sagging surfaces a homage to natural bodies that do not fit the proverbial mould. The malleability of my material opened me up to the sensuousness of the forms I was creating as the voluptuous allusions to flesh were met with a desire to be touched. This shift in part occurs due to the limitless possibilities offered by abstraction, which “stages relationships among forms and their contexts, allowing us to see differently the ways in which those relationships can unfold” (Getsy, 2019: 66).

In an investigation preoccupied with relationships ranging from patriarchal power dynamics to queer family structures, alternatives to heteronormative narratives provided through an interest in abstraction become important. How will my choices in warping, clustering, enlarging and abstracting the visual elements of the final presentation impact the cerebral and bodily experience of the work? This question is in part answered by Getsy who proposes that “abstraction is about relations, and a queer investment in abstraction can be a way to allegorize social relations through a playing out of formal relations. Distinct forms of embodiment, deviating desires, and new ways of relating to bodies can be proposed through abstraction” (2019: 66). With regard to the evocative interplay between forms, it is pertinent to mention the work of Slovakian sculptor Maria Bartuszová, who’s work I became interested in due to the thematic and aesthetic connections between her practice and my own.

Temporality, negative and positive space, as well as the weight and abstraction of the body were of interest to me as similar considerations were emerging in my own work. Her ethereal, organic sculptures are mainly comprised of plaster of paris casts (figures 8 and 9) that deal centrally with the interplay between negative and positive space in tandem with touch and weight (Searle et al., n.d.). Conceptual lines can be drawn between the plaster works by Bartuszová and my three-dimensional ceramic works. Art critic Laura Gascoigne describes Bartuszová’s negative casting method as pneumatic²¹.

I too have explored the void in my ceramic process. Starting with a solid mass of clay, I hollowed out the form after the rough shape was established. In working from the outside inwards, I was left with a bodily ‘shell’ that was in some ways reminiscent of Bartuszová’s methodology. We are both interested in the particularities or “echoes of the human body” where “the forms are not just palpable, they’re palpable”

²¹ This method of casting involved coating inflated balloons with plaster, where the rubber balloon is later stripped away, leaving a fragile shell (Gascoigne, 2022).

(Gascoigne, 2022). The hollowing out was as conceptual as it was a practical exercise. Apart from preventing the clay form from cracking in the kiln when it is fired, the process reflected the internal shifts occurring in how I perceived my body. The process was intimate and tactile –I sat with the weighty sculpture on my lap as if contending with another being.

The care and intention that went into the process of excavating excess clay felt like a release of the proverbial weight I carried from the narrow-minded or misguided comments I received about my body.



Figure 8

Through taking a phenomenological approach in this section, I frame this project as a navigation of the ideological environments that shape us as we in turn shape them. By considering the value of touch and queer abstraction in my practice, I have come to understand that narratives of desire and belonging are fluid and can oppose damaging heteronormative classifications of the body. Through a discussion on Bartuszová's practice, negative space as a metaphor for transformative thinking has been explored. This interest in voids is extended to a series of tactile impressions I produced with my body and porcelain clay.

Figure 9



Navel to Navel

The navel is a thing to be interpreted: to create universal meaning through language. It is not really a thing — at least a fixed thing — but a subjective defining process.

— Justin Hendriks and Mirka Koro, *An Invitation to Gaze: Palpating the Navel in Qualitative Research*

The process of impression casting (figure 10) involved curling into a foetal position and filling in the hollow areas formed at the points of compression with porcelain clay, which captures details such as fine wrinkles and hair. My body took the crouched form of a child curled inwards for protection or out of fear. Of the resulting impressions, I was most taken by the positive renderings of my navel area where the cast clay forms allude to breasts and nipples (figure 11 is a reference photo of my chest). In an article entitled *An Invitation to Gaze: Palpating the Navel in Qualitative Research*, Justin Hendriks and Mirka Koro frame the navel as a “connection to the (m)other other...It is a channel of reciprocity, exchange, and medium of affects” (2023: 537). These insights resonated

with me. Their conceptualisation of the ‘(m)other’ and the bellybutton as an affective channel links to themes in my project such as intimacy, family and childhood memory. Through the repetitive use of my bellybutton as a sculptural matrix, I reflect on navel gazing and how it functions as a generative approach to my practice.

Navel gazing was a concept introduced to me as a child to illustrate selfishness. The ‘navel kijkers’ as they are known in Dutch, settled in my developing mind as a vision of malformed bodies with bowed spines and necks, hunched over in a “practice of excessive and overdetailed focus on the ‘self’ through aggrandizement” (Hendricks & Koro, 2023: 537). Initially, this grotesque imagery cast a shadow on the process of imagining I decided to undertake. I dispelled

my concerns when I started to foreground the importance of queer narratology and subjectivity. I have further developed my approach to working with personal experiences by viewing my practice as a kind of ‘navel-ing’, an “active entangled material process—not one focused solely on the active self and constructed/perceived subject/object dichotomies—but on the intertwining of processes” (Hendricks & Koro, 2023: 537). This entanglement manifests through visualising fragmented and overlapping experiences of queerness and patriarchal violence, and how their boundaries brush up against each other.

Figure 10



Figure 11

In line with the earlier discussion on relationality informed by Getsy’s views on queer abstraction, the gender ambiguous casts of my body resist the immediate taxonomies demanded by an imperialist, heteronormative gaze. The unfamiliar forms created by my navel, crook of my elbow and the backs of my knees are bodily yet elude immediate categorisation as references to specific body parts. Hendriks and Koro echo the importance of this resistance in

stating that “queering the navel and decolonizing navel-gazing calls for the defamiliarization of the “obvious” to make impossible and unseen navel(s) more accessible and sensible” (2023: 537). I explore this defamiliarization further in another artwork, an installation consisting of a scaled-up version of my family dinner table and a large stepping stool, unpacking themes of domesticity, memory and childhood trauma.

My experience of familial conflict was marked by the frequent dismissal of the opinions my brother and I held as children. The expansive surface of *Seën Here Wat Ons Eet, Laat Ons Nimmer U Vergeet, Amen* (figure 13) becomes a plane on which the tension of these conflicts play out. The title is a prayer I have heard thousands of times, always offered quickly and efficiently by my father before family meals. Ascribing to the social conventions of a nuclear family unit, my mother, father, brother and I would eat dinner together almost every night. The periods where silence sat at our table often carried with it a weight I reckon with in this work.

In part, my interest in scale is in response to not feeling seen or heard during conflict and the ‘inherent’ value I thought the opinions of my towering parents held over mine. I believe the elements of subjugation I experienced are inextricably linked to the often-patriarchal configuration of nuclear family units and the subsequent values and roles engrained in children.

Figure 12



The table I’ve produced is inspired by the wooden table that has moved with us to various homes and is still used by my parents. The sculpture’s top comes up to my current eye-level and is scaled up to roughly the size our table was when I would hide under it and consume copious amounts of syrup²² as a child. In order to allude to the disordered eating I engaged in to alleviate acute anxiety, I have installed a large, wooden teat-like protuberance (figure 12) to the underside of the table, which references the nipple/navel discussed above. The surface of the form seems to be held taut by the dark amber resin resembling blood or syrup with which it is filled. The liquid cannot be contained by the wooden breast and leaks from its nipple, pooling below. Set into the flat surface of the wood towards the head of the table, the object is placed in a spot often reserved for the patriarch of a family.

²² According to a medical journal article entitled *The impact of sugar consumption on stress driven, emotional and addictive behaviours*, “the desire to eat is regulated by brain regions known as feeding centres... Importantly, these regions are interconnected with the limbic system 1 (Queensland Brain Institute, n.d.) and cerebral cortex (“Merriam-Webster”, n.d.), which are responsible for the modulation of emotions” (Jacques et al., 2019).

The viewer is encouraged to venture into the negative space under the table to visually and tactilely explore the sculpture. In doing so, they potentially experience the varied reasons children seek shelter under the canopies of dinner tables, from playing hide-and-seek to hiding out of fear or shame. The presence of a scaled-up stepping stool near the table invites the viewer to curiously peer over the top of the table to see the glinting surface of the viscous liquid in the same way a child might access this view if provided with the extra height. Ahmed’s discussion on tables in *Orientations: Toward a queer phenomenology* is a rich conceptual resource for developing my understanding of the experiential relationships we have with objects. Through manipulating qualities of weight, scale and form, I aim to allude to the memories of existing both at and under my own dinner table and how these experiences have shaped my sense of self.

She speaks of her own family table thusly: “Shaped by what we do with it, the table takes shape through what we do...Its polished surfaces reflect to ourselves and to others the “reflection” of the family, the family as image and as imagined” (Ahmed, 2006: 559). Although we communicate feelings of love and intimacy in my immediate family, there are points at which my queerness and their heteronormative values create tension. I resonate with Ahmed’s assertion that, “when queer bodies do join the family table, the table does not stay in place. Queer bodies are out of place in certain family gatherings, which is what produces, in the first place, a queer effect. The table might even become wonky” (Ahmed, 2006: 568). This sculpture serves as a reflection on unhealthy conflict and coping mechanisms that formed part of my upbringing.

In line with the destabilising effect of the table, I wanted to work with the found chairs and alter them in order to further explore the ‘queer effect’ that Ahmed discusses. *Sit Stil I* (figure 14) and *Voel/Voël, Rosendal* (figure 15) reflects on fragility and absence. What happens when a support which once held can no longer bear weight? *Voel/Voël, Rosendal* is comprised of a wax cast of a deceased bird I came across while spending time in the town my parents currently live. Against the wall mounted seat of a dining room chair the vulnerable cast is precariously supported by metal pins, the threat of falling is palpable and present.

Looking again at Salcedo’s use of suspended chairs as alluding to domestic familiarity, I worked into the stable structure of dining room chairs to create new ways in which to engage with them. The teetering support they offer are moments away from collapse, which opens up for new, queer possibilities.

Figure 13





Figure 14



Figure 15

Felt/Veld

Through a desire to understand why I struggle with nail biting and skin picking, I researched Body Focused Repetitive Behaviours (BFRBs²³). This roused questions regarding tactility and safe spaces. How does repetition manifest in the material processes of my work? Would a tactile encounter with impermanent sculptures offer the viewer a more nuanced understanding of queer affect? I reflect on these questions through considering two unfired clay sculptures that garnered meaning through breaking. I then discuss a series of assemblage works entitled *Veld I* through the lens of queer posthumanism, a framework in which the themes of kinship, desire, hybridity and alterity are expanded upon.

My practice reflects on art making as an example of stimulus regulation, as well as a means to find healthier ways to process stress. The physicality of working with clay, in particular the act of wedging and burnishing, serves as an example of this. Wedging refers to the method of kneading clay with precise and repetitive bodily movements through which air bubbles and other impurities are brought up to the surface in order to remove them. This intersects conceptually with themes of suppression and excavation as discussed in Part

II. It also serves to align the structure of the clay to encourage elasticity and resilience. Burnishing involves continuously rubbing and polishing semi-dried clay with a smooth object so their surfaces begin to take on the same quality. Through these repetitive acts, I achieved similar regulatory effects to nail biting and skin picking without the negative consequences associated with BFRBs. In creating *Magies vol, ogies toe* (figure 16), both these processes were integral²⁴.

Figure 16



²⁴ The title translates to 'full tummies, eyes closed' and is used to describe the lethargic feeling experienced after a large meal. In this context, it alludes to the way the work is engaged tactically and not only through the traditional optic sense.

A hairline crack and moisture in the wet winter air caused the overhanging area of this sculpture to fall to the ground, changing the mode of display and meaning behind the work. Before it broke, the gleaming surface of the drooping sculpture had a gravitational pull of its own. Building on the earlier discussion of the haptic, the intimate acts of wedging and burnishing that bring me into close proximity with the unfired clay surface are reflected in the way people spontaneously and gently caressed the folds and bulges it was comprised of. Looking again at phenomenology, Ahmed states that “we perceive the object as an object, as something that has integrity and is in space, only by haunting that very space, by cohabiting space, such that the boundary between the co-inhabitants of space does not hold. The skin connects as well as contains” (2006: 551).

²³ In Nail biting: A body-focused repetitive behaviour case report, BFRBs are described as the “symbolic representation of unresolved unconscious conflicts” (Juneja et al., 2016: 33). They can serve as coping mechanisms for emotional regulation during states of depression, anxiety, tension or frustration. Stimulus regulation is defined as a “self-regulatory process whereby individuals identify and respond to somatic events” (Houghton et al., 2018). This definition was sourced from a psychology journal article entitled Abnormal Perceptual Sensitivity in Body-Focused Repetitive Behaviors.

Although accepting that the work found its own queer form through breaking was initially difficult, it has led to exploring the precarity of intimacy, touch and impermanence in ways I did not anticipate. Deciding to leave this work unfired (figure 16 and 17) and thus in its most vulnerable state “effectively de-familiarises it. In a fragile or otherwise transient form, it challenges the percipient to reconsider assumptions about consistency and stability” (Gee, 2016: 116). This relates back to Getsy’s notions of queer abstraction and the unintelligibility of work by Cassils and Harry Dodge. In foregoing “the closure that firing engenders and denying permanence to the artefact” (Gee, 2016: 110), some of the pieces in the exhibition become ephemeral as their longevity cannot be guaranteed.

Figure 17





*My Pa is My Rots*²⁵ (figure 18) came about unintentionally, the rock within acting as a support and ballast that I would later remove. The heat of my studio dried the clay faster than I anticipated, which resulted in the fleshy form cracking to reveal the rock beneath. The rock suddenly shifted for me from steadfast to existing in a state of vulnerability, sheltering below the fragile clay. Like Ahmed's family table, the burnished surface becomes a reflection of the stoic provider as image and as imagined. The juxtaposition between the glossy exterior and rough, weathered interior of the work confronted me with the human fallibility that the symbol of the father figure is often denied.

Thinking about my experiences of my father's reluctance to express his vulnerable self to me, I was reminded of the saying 'to get blood from a stone'²⁶. Alluding to this, I have incorporated the same viscous liquid pooling under the large table in this work. The dark liquid seeps from under the rock as if the sculpture is wounded and in need of care. Through the viewers physical interaction with these impermanent objects, I hope "a tension may be perceived: if objects bring stability to human lives by their sameness, their persistence, and their reliability, then impermanent clay objects (as well as short-lived processes and events involving clay) upset and agitate that expectation" (Gee, 2016: 129). This disruption of socially constructed narratives of 'stability' is also prevalent in the assemblage objects that *Veld I* is comprised of.

Figure 18

²⁵ Translates to 'My father is my rock'

²⁶ Cambridge dictionary defines the idiom as trying "to make someone give or tell you something, when it is extremely difficult because of the character or mood of the person or organization you are dealing with".

As the series of works grew in number, I became aware of their collective potential for re-imagining the heteropatriarchal symbols and conditions that constitute traditional views on kinship. In order to explore broader definitions of desire and to shift the emphasis away from blood relation as the most important “culturally specific way of demarcating and calculating relationships” (Weston, 1991: 154), I draw on *Queer Posthumanism: Cyborgs, Animals, Monsters, Perverts* by Patricia MacCormack. This is followed by a discussion on materiality and how human-animal hybridity could allow for an affective engagement with “paradigms which reiterate the huMan as dominant and oppressive” (MacCormack, 2009: 121).

I intend these abstracted forms to map out my experiences of intimacy in ways that supersede the heteronormative demarcation of it. In line with Halberstam and Bradleys’ assertions on alternative forms of embodiment, MacCormack states that “Posthuman life collapses demarcated entities and refuses the compulsion to know in order to master rather than create. The creations of connections – life as relation not dividuation – is posthuman living” (2009: 113). To visually express this mode of relational living, the various components of *Veld I* (figure 19) are disassembled and reconstructed each time they are presented. It is comprised of modified meranti dowels which are lashed together using strips of vellum²⁷.



Figure 19

49 ²⁷ Vellum is the untanned skin of an animal, originally used as a writing material.

In this way, the composition is not static and transforms with every iteration. The work is intermittently lit by a motion triggered floodlight reminiscent of the safety lights installed on the game farm where I spent a large portion of my adolescence. The viewer's presence is implicated in the visibility and subsequent vulnerability of the sculpture. My experiences of being seen and acknowledged as queer have been either affirming or detrimental depending on the situation. Jack Halberstam writes that "new visibility for any given community has advantages and disadvantages, liabilities and potentialities. With recognition comes acceptance, with acceptance comes power, with power comes regulation... but it could also have unforeseen consequences in terms of exposing people who were passing in one gender or another to new forms of scrutiny and speculation" (2018: 18). The sudden and jarring light casts these potentialities into stark relief.

The ambiguous nature of the structure (which is reminiscent to me of an asterisk) takes new meaning in relation to Halberstam's writing on the diacritical mark he attaches to the word 'trans*'. He asserts that "the asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity (Halberstam, 2018: 4). Along with the tapering and wonky ends of the dowels, the felted works seem to gesticulate and defend themselves with sharp metal bird-deterrent spikes (as seen in figure 20 and 21), staging an encounter with the viewer as well as with each other. When nestled within the potential safety provided by the wooden supports, the felted sculptures can read as a herd or pack that reflect aspects of relationality and hapticity evident in Halberstam's writing and the work of Harry Dodge. Encountering these defamiliarizing objects could serve as a meditation on how expansive queer notions of safety, gender and family can be, especially when read alongside the narrow understanding presented by hegemonic patriarchy.



Figure 20



Figure 21

The need for broader definitions of familial connection and gender expression is reflected by co-authors Collier and Yanagisako in *Gender and kinship; essays toward a unified analysis*. They assert that “When we assume male-headed, nuclear families to be central units of kinship, and all alternative patterns to be extensions or exceptions, we accept an aspect of cultural hegemony instead of studying it. In the process, we miss the contested domain in which symbolic innovation may occur” (Collier & Yanagisako, 1987: 129). This call for reinscribing the symbols and signifiers of family has been generative to my thinking around these works. In *Veld I*, the imagined behaviours these objects exhibit and constructing a space of belonging reflect my own thinking around kinship and protection. I am “entering into alliances with things that cannot speak...entering into alliances with inhumans or less-than-humans” (2009: 120) to engage with what MacCormack asserts is the queer in the Posthuman.

This alliance is further reflected in the hybridisation of manufactured human and animal material in the making of *Skattebol*²⁸ (figure 22, 23 and 24). Fragile limbs stretch out as if in prayer, clay impressions of my bellybutton becoming nurturing teats on their back while iron oxide stains the colour of dried blood.

With the creation of the series this work belongs to, I aim to raise questions around the ‘unnatural’ and how the term is associated with what Zitzelsberger defines as the “moralistic, phallogocentric, heterosexual and generally conservative ideologies of the natural and their rejection, if not demonization, of the (unnatural, perverse) Other” (2020: 70). My choice of material, mainly the combination of sheep’s wool which I felt with and the ceramic renderings of my body, amalgamate in an abstract form suggestive of a human-animal hybrid which could challenge these notions of the unnatural.

Figure 22



55 ²⁸ A common Afrikaans term of endearment my mother often refers to me by. It doesn't translate perfectly

This hybridity is further explored by MacCormack, who asserts that “Our becoming-animal is neither acting like nor pretending to be, but an entering into particular affects shared with animals that join us into hybrid formations which transform the animal concept with our becoming” (2009: 123).

This act of becoming rather than being is inherent to the formulation of this peculiar, even monstrous form, both in a practical and conceptual sense. Their creation is informed by the writing of Florian Zitzelsberger. Encompassing the connective qualities of queer storytelling, Zitzelsberger references “the spatial imagery of Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* (2020:169),” positing that “metalepsis would then signify a contact zone, a moment of proximity, a queering of parallels. Metalepsis has a queer impetus for it brings together, builds bridges, and creates unity” (2020: 79).

Like many of my other works, *Skattebol* is resistant to binary categorisation, a resistance which is reflected in the lived experiences of many queer individuals. Rather than a weakness, Zitzelsberger asserts that failing at being ‘natural’ “is nothing to be associated with negative affects; rather, queer failure becomes a means of substantiating queer subjectivity and of objecting to the naturalization of straightness in narrative” (2020: 78). As with my felted works, I consider ‘failure’ as Zitzelsberger has described here, as an integral aspect to the unfired clay work discussed above.

Figure 23





As explicated throughout this section, engaging with tactile and repetitive artistic methodologies provides alternative opportunities for self-regulation. Ephemeral, haptic encounters with fragile ceramic constructions could agitate notions of patriarchal stability and encourage queer, affective reflections on intimacy. *Veld I*, as an assemblage of quasi-organic forms, calls for spaces of belonging and safety for queer bodies in light of the hyper-visibility they are subjected to within a heteropatriarchal society. In utilising posthumanism as a lens through which to discuss themes of alterity and hybridity in this series, the queer desire to reframe heteronormative perceptions of the 'natural' world becomes apparent.

Figure 24

These queries have developed my own understanding of Berlant's assertion that, "Rethinking intimacy calls out not only for redescription but for transformative analyses of the rhetorical and material conditions that enable hegemonic fantasies to thrive in the minds and on the bodies of subjects..." (Berlant, 1998: 286). It is this rethinking which I believe sits not only at the core of these ceramic and felted assemblage objects, but the research project as a whole.

Ephemera

Think of ephemera as trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumour.

—José Esteban Muñoz, *Ephemera as Evidence* – Introductory notes on queer acts

The work discussed in this section deals with the fluctuating relationship I have with my father. I am interested in how compounding moments of shared tension and connection can be visualised through notions of the palimpsest and trace. To deepen my understanding of how these concepts relate to the project, I reference queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz, art historian Jennifer Roberts and music professor Orit Hilewicz. I use these theoretical and visual elements as a framework through which to reflect on a performance, a large-scale paperwork and a sound piece.

Ek is nogsteeds lief vir jou

To contend with the symbolic weight of my father as patriarch, I took clay equivalent to his body weight and, in a phenomenological sense, attempted to shape the mass as it in turn shapes me. In the fourth chapter of José Esteban Muñoz's polemic *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, he speaks about performance as an embodied act that demands, "in the openness and closeness of relations to others, an exchange and alteration of kinesthetic experience through which we become, in a sense, less like ourselves and more like each other" (Muñoz, 2009: 66). Although he is writing about the dance floor as a site for queer performativity, the bodily experience he describes here rings true for my performance, where the paper backdrop becomes a site where inarticulable emotions can unfold. A brief description of the performance provides a textual account of the act.

I sat naked on the expansive white sheet, inhaling and exhaling slowly to calm my nerves. After some time, I packed the slabs of clay stacked next to me onto the paper. I smoothed the mound together, after which I applied a generous amount of graphite powder to the area around the mass of clay. I then spent thirty minutes struggling to move it around, my arms and legs burning with the effort. I occasionally held the father figure in an embrace, feeling the cold surface thaw to body temperature from its contact with my hot skin. In acts of disruption and repair, I deeply scratched the surface of the polished looking clay with my fingers, after which I smoothed the wounded exterior with my palms. This cycle of moving, disruption, repair and embracing continued until I collapsed on top of the mass, too exhausted to continue. The powder, moisture from the clay and my sweat combined to create a complex layering of fleshy imprints and sweeping, gestural marks onto paper wrinkled like skin.

I have experimented and grappled with the various forms in which to present the material from this performance. Although I initially thought to include everything it produced, the photographs and video recordings made the ephemeral tangible in a way that contradicted my thinking around impermanence and intimacy. In *Ephemera as Evidence – Introductory notes on queer acts*, Muñoz describes ephemera as a:

modality of anti-rigor and anti-evidence that, far from filtering materiality out of cultural studies, reformulates and expands our understandings of materiality. Ephemera, as I am using it here, is linked to alternate modes of textuality and narrativity like memory and performance: It is all of those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself. It does not rest on epistemological foundations but is instead interested in following traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things. (1996: 10)

Muñoz's thoughts on alternative narrative modes aligns with the way I approach queer subjectivity and memory in this project. Although they do not feature in the final body of work, the video and series of digitally overlaid photographs (as seen in figure 25) still function as archival records of the performance. In their stead, a sound and paper work more closely relates to themes of absence and residue.

Figure 25



The physical and emotional exertion generated from this dialogical act is mapped out onto the seven-meter-long photography backdrop paper (figure 26 on following page). *Ek is nogsteeds lief vir jou* resulted from my interest in translating intimacy in obfuscated ways through utilising temporality, trace, and ephemerality. Through a series of online lectures on print making, art historian Jennifer Roberts has influenced my thinking around this work as a print relying on the principles of print media rather than my original conception of it as a drawing.

My body and the mass of clay act as the matrix from which the gestural images are printed onto the paper, which takes on the role of support. The graphite powder and moisture from the clay and my sweat become the ink which is applied to the surface through weight and pressure. "Every print is the result of contact and release, which links it to the themes of touch, presence and intimacy, but also loss, separation and memory" (Roberts, 2021).



pressure they exerted on large canvasses coated in wet paint and covered in a plastic film. The monotypes, such as this early example, become the bases onto which Adams and his team weave the tapestries presented in a 2024 show entitled *Weerhoud*. Through collaborating with the dancers, Adams recognises the possibility- as I do through my research- for releasing stored or suppressed emotions through movement and engaging with memory and history (Carrier et al., 2024: 24). I resonate with the intuitive energy that these works hold, especially when I consider them alongside the print I have created. Both are created through what Roberts describes as an intimate moment of contact between matrix and support that happens darkly, where no one can observe the process taking place (Roberts, 2021).

Figure 27



69 These themes align not only with the concerns of my exploratory research, but also with a recent body of work by prolific South African artist Igshaan Adams. I was deeply moved by the conceptualisation these large scale prints (figure 27), which “delves into the effects of trauma on the human psyche, while also exploring the healing potential of movement” (Carrier et al., 2024: 12). Adams set up collaborative sessions with South African dance group *Garage Dance Ensemble*. The members of the group created large scale abstract monotypes through the



Figure 28

Building on the theory of phenomenology and notions of intimacy discussed previously, the abstracted bodily forms in my work are shaped and layered through close proximity, or, as Sara Ahmed describes, a haunting and cohabitation of space (2006: 551). There's a tension between the intimate act of printing and the vulnerability of having my naked form brightly lit and recorded from multiple angles (figure 28). Like the scrutinising glare of the floodlight that snaps *Veld 1* into view, my soft, White, queer body becomes a "symbol open to communication through readings and misreadings that can result in displacement and belonging" (Carrier et al., 2024:15). It is necessary here to acknowledge the protections and multifaceted privileges my Whiteness affords me when thinking about the dominant systems that disproportionately put queer people of colour at risk of exposure and violence. The aim of the project is to engage with how personal experience intertwines with

²⁹ The journal article written by the two Swiss academics is titled *Queering the Palimpsest: Affective Entanglement Beyond Dichotomization* and has also informed my thinking around the layering of the photographs taken during the performance.

³⁰ Bismillah is the shortened version of the phrase 'Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim' which translates to, 'In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful' (Simbao, 2015)

broader social narratives in a South African context and generate dialogue that could benefit the racially diverse queer community.

I view my performance as a collaborative effort between myself and the clay 'father figure' to grapple with the overlapping experiences of love, anger, humour and disappointment that has shaped our relationship. The metaphor of the palimpsest is particularly useful in articulating the work in this section, as it "offers a way to theorize subjectivity as structured by power relations yet open to potentiality"²⁹ (Binswanger & Zimmermann, 2018). In staging this affective encounter, I engage with the layered norms, expectations and possible iterations of a father and child relationship. Although Adams and I have very different cultural entry points from which we engage with familial intimacy, I have found thematic intersections between *Ek is nog steeds lief vir jou* and *Bismillah*³⁰ (figure 29).

This iteration of Adams' performance was site specific and held in the basement of the 1820 Settlers National Monument in Makhanda, which formed part of the National Arts Festival in 2014 (Simbao, 2015). His body becomes "both an instrument and a site upon which complex ideas and emotions can be set" (Carrier et al., 2024: 15), his father bathing Adams as part of a traditional Muslim funeral rite conducted in preparation for burial. This work is noted as a turning point in their difficult relationship as well as facilitating a new understanding of his queerness within the context of his Muslim heritage (Carrier et al., 2024: 23).

Through the focus on intuitive movement and abstracted forms in the monotype dance prints and implicating the body in a collaborative effort for reconciliation in *Bismillah*, the potential for transformative healing is centred. Although I have formulated my own methodologies through which to engage with these concerns, the glimmers and traces of ephemeral gesture can be read within our respective practices.



Figure 29

Hoor Jy vir My?³¹

This auditory work acts as a sonic record of the performance, which is played aloud in the same space as *Seën Here Wat Ons Eet, Laat Ons Nimmer U Vergeet, Amen*. Through my research, I have come to understand the work as a form of acoustic palimpsest³² which "involves the imagination that completes and interprets sound events" (Hilewicz, 2022: 6). The viewers' interpretation of the work is of interest as the sounds created by my breathing, hands smacking against the clay surface and grunts of exertion from moving the mass around are ambiguous and can be read in a variety of ways. The immediate connotations I drew upon hearing the recording were ones of extreme pain and violence. The sudden and potentially distressing sounds reverberate off the walls and are reminiscent of doors slammed shut in

anger or reactions to flat palms striking tender skin. The title refers to an admonishment I often heard before I was sent to the bathroom to await corporal punishment for misbehaving.

These moments of intense sounds are interspersed with periods of quiet shuffling and measured breathing as I embrace the clay and still my heartbeat. The fluctuating sound scape blends with the noises in the viewer's immediate surroundings, which could result in an unsettling experience. As Hilewicz describes, "listening to a Palimpsest can be an experience of anxiety...and discomfort, as one is trying to filter out foreground sound in order to perceive the background" (2022: 6). Through placing this work in relation to the physically overwhelming wooden table which also reflects on palimpsestic moments of anger and love shared between members of a family, I aim to create a dialogue between the sound piece, the sculpture and the viewer.

³¹ Translates to 'Do you hear me?'

³² Hilewicz attributes this term to associate professor at the New York University, Martin Daughtry, who describes it as a multi-layered acoustic experience embedded in acts of "erasure, effacement, occupation, displacement, collaboration, and reinscription" (Hilewicz, 2022: 6).

Is ons amper daar?

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality.

— José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising utopia: the then and there of queer futurity*

I recall long distance road trips that began in the dark, syrupy hours before dawn when it felt like the rest of the world was wading through a viscous pool. Sleep took me as soon as we left our driveway. Groggily I woke a few hours into the trip as we pulled into some petrol station or other, the sunlight like the moment before something big should happen. I mumbled “is ons amper daar?” and the inevitable “nog nie” (not yet) felt strangely reassuring, as if I was being afforded another chance to return to my *lethargic golden dreams*.

The notion of concluding has proven the most challenging aspect of formulating this text. There is something about the last paragraph, the last word, that seems to fix ideas in place in ways which sit incongruously with an endeavour concerned with open-ended queer potentiality. Innumerable joyous and traumatic recollections punctuated my exploration of memory, queerness, intimacy and family. In order to ground these palimpsestic thoughts, I looked at three relational models through which the pervasiveness of patriarchal ideology as a hypernorm in South Africa are engaged.

Emphasising the importance of queer subjectivity, I recount personal experiences of the physical and psychological violence through which this dominant social structure is maintained. An exploration into how other artistic practices reflect on the damaging effects of heteropatriarchy led to valuable research on the healing and reconciliatory potential of performance, hapticity and abstraction. These themes were explored to envision forms of embodiment that are resistant to heteronormative modes of classification. This resistance deepened my interest in visual strategies and methodologies that foreground the absence and presence of the queer body. Through a phenomenological approach, I reflect on intimacy and scale in the creation of large and small-scale works that stage an encounter in which the viewer plays a role. When placed in relation to each other, the works in *My Hart Kry Swaar* gesticulate with reckless abandon, pointing with sharp and wonky ends to the potential ‘amper daar’ and ‘nog nie’ moments that queerness is comprised of.

Figure list

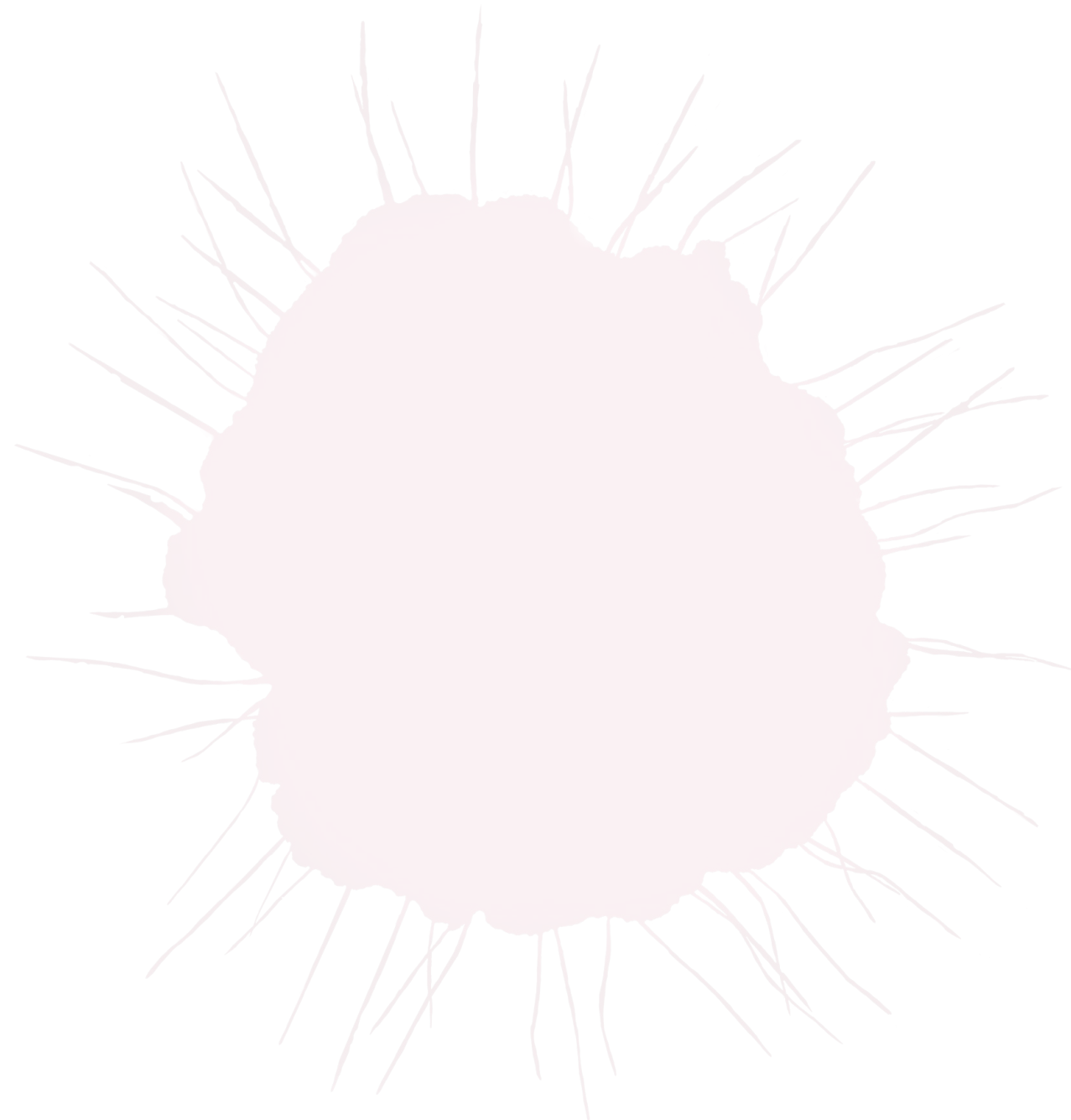


Figure i

Miró van der Vloed

Close-up of *Ek is nogsteeds lief vir jou*
2024

Figure ii

Miró van der Vloed

Film photo of dead cow
2020

Figure 1

Cassils

Becoming an Image
2013

Figure 2

Cassils

The Resilience of the 20%
2013

Figure 3

Doris Salcedo

Noviembre 6 y 7
2002

Figure 4

Harry Dodge

Consent-not-to-be-a-single-being series
2015

Figure 5

Miró van der Vloed

Selfportret
2023

Figure 6

Miró van der Vloed

Selfportret reference image
2023

Figure 7

Miró van der Vloed
Selfportret reference image
2023

Figure 8

Maria Bartuszová
Untitled
1982

Figure 9

Maria Bartuszová
Untitled
1973

Figure 10

Miró van der Vloed
Detail shot of Skattebol
2024

Figure 11

Miró van der Vloed
Selfportret reference image
2023

Figure 12

Miró van der Vloed
Seën Here Wat Ons Eet,
Laat Ons Nimmer U Vergeet,
Amen (detail shot)
2024

Figure 13

Miró van der Vloed
Seën Here Wat Ons Eet,
Laat Ons Nimmer U Vergeet,
Amen
2024

Figure 14

Miró van der Vloed
Sit stil I
2024

Figure 15

Miró van der Vloed
Voel/Voël, Rosendal
2024

Figure 16

Miró van der Vloed
Magies vol, ogies toe (voor die val)
2023

Figure 17

Miró van der Vloed
Magies vol, ogies toe (na die val)
2024

Figure 18

Miró van der Vloed
My Pa is My Rots
2024

Figure 19

Miró van der Vloed
Veld I
2024

Figure 20

Miró van der Vloed
Veld I (detail shot)
2024

Figure 21

Miró van der Vloed
Veld I (detail shot)
2024

Figure 22

Miró van der Vloed
Skattebol
2024

Figure 23

Miró van der Vloed
Skattebol (detail shot)
2024

Figure 24

Miró van der Vloed
Skattebol (detail shot)
2024

Figure 25

Miró van der Vloed

PalimpSES

2023

Figure 26

Miró van der Vloed

Ek is nogsteeds lief vir jou

2024

Figure 27

Igshaan Adams

Photographed by Lindsey Appolis,

image courtesy of the artist

2022

Figure 28

Miró van der Vloed

Ek is nogsteeds lief vir jou (process shot)

2024

Figure 29

Igshaan Adams

Bismillah

2014

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