

## **Chapter 5**

***'The body, [...], provides a basic scheme for all symbolism.'*<sup>52</sup>**

Body exploration is ground zero in contemporary art, particularly in sculpture, with its inherent three-dimensionality. 'It's hard to think of an artist today who isn't referencing the body in some way,' says Michael Auping, chief curator of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. 'It's all about the body when you go to the doctor. It's all about the body when you look through *Vanity Fair*. The body is the conduit for all our hopes and worst fears. It houses the disease that can't be cured.'<sup>53</sup>

Contemporary sculpture tends to disassemble the body so that it is no longer legible as a *body*, but rather functions as a series of references to the body that take place at various levels and with varying coherence. Even bodies that are not human, and bodies that are inorganic attract metaphoric readings and are understood, often unconsciously, as analogues to bodies. In this sense seeing *is* seeing bodies, or the search for them.

I have already mentioned how the physiognomy of Wafer's oval sculptures may allude to the body, aspects related to the body and to emotional reactions to these. The oval shapes are reminiscent of or may allude to the belly or torso, even to a simplified head, to various swellings and orifices, and to decorative or ritualistic marks made on the body. The surface articulations of Wafer's *ova/s* also allude to physical manifestations of suffering and pain: tears, wounds and revealing orifices that possibly speak of heightened states of visceral awareness in the human body. These could be inflicted - for example during some forms of ceremony, transition and ritual - not just ordinary day-to-day markings, but painful, representative, symbolic markings in the body of the partaker and on the 'body' of the sculpture.

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<sup>52</sup> Douglas, 1966, p.164

<sup>53</sup> Sheets, 2001

I believe that this type of interpretation is the most straightforward and instinctive one made by any viewer, informed or not, of a three-dimensional sculpture. Our impressions are schematically determined. As perceivers we select from all the stimuli impacting on our senses only those that interest us, and our interests are governed by a pattern-making tendency, sometimes called a *schema*. In a chaos of shifting impressions, each one of us constructs a stable world in which objects have recognisable shapes, are located in depth, and have permanence. Projecting the body onto the reduced forms of the *ovals* is an instinctive way of organising, classifying or clarifying their ambiguity.

James Elkins remarks on how in the absence of bodies, we embark on a search for body metaphors – for bodily lengths, weights, colours, textures, shapes, and movements – and in that second search we tend to be easily satisfied and content with the most obvious choices.<sup>54</sup> Belly. Torso. Orifice. The body is our most immediate and omnipresent experience of reality and solidity, but it may also be subjectively elusive. It is at once the most solid, the most elusive, ellusory, concrete, metaphorical, ever present and ever distant thing - a site, an instrument, an environment, a singularity and a multiplicity. Empathy is a useful way to describe the subtle but universal visceral or bodily effects that artworks can evoke. They can make one experience any of a whole range of sensations – like expansiveness, crowdedness, being uncomfortable, thin, swollen or pained.

Body symbolism is part of the common stock of symbols, deeply emotive because of the individual's experience. Emotional reactions may have to do with the cleansed, ritualized, symbolic body, the result of a cleansing/reductive process involving change, pain, and a looking 'inside' to arrive at those particular shapes.

I do not think the *ovals* refer to gender. One could describe the rounded mounds as female/feminine, resembling, as they do, pregnant bellies. The

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<sup>54</sup> Elkins, 1999, p.6

swollen protrusions could refer to female physiognomy such as breasts, and the incisions could refer to vaginas. The use of the earthy red colour could allude to the earth, which was and still is seen as a female archetype. Yet I believe the sculptures can and should be interpreted in a far broader way. They are not specific: they refer to the body male and female, the essential body in a state beyond the 'normal', in a heightened or disrupted state.

One can compare the 'reading' of Wafer's *ovals* to Bryan S. Turner's 'reading' of the body: deviances of body surfaces/sculpture surfaces (blushes, flushes, unwanted excreta / protrusions, stigmatic abnormalities, swellings, incisions, scars) which are subject to cultural surveillance, and those 'deviances' of the inner body (disease and illness), which are likewise objects of moral evaluation. 'The sociology of the body as vehicle of information about the self would thus divide around the stigmatology of the outer surface and a teratology of deformed structures.'<sup>55</sup> In other words, we can think of the body as an outer surface of interpretations and representations and an internal environment of structures and determinations. 'What is being carved in human flesh is an image of society.'<sup>56</sup>

Cultural anthropologists like Mary Douglas and Bryan S. Turner have had a special concern with the body in relation to symbolism. The sociology of the body is seen as a system of signs that acts as the carrier or bearer of social meaning or symbolism. Ritual preparation of the body, the scarification of the body and the cultural transformation of the body in rites of passage have been central topics of cultural anthropology.

The symbolism worked upon the human body is direct. The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures. Mary Douglas interprets rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva et al by seeing in the body a symbol of

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<sup>55</sup> Turner, 1996, p.66-68

<sup>56</sup> Douglas, 1966, p.166

society, with the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in micro on the human body. We can therefore look at the oval 'bodies' of Wafer's sculptures as 'bodies' upon which some form of ritual has taken place to move them into a heightened state that may reflect society in several ways.

The art of Rodin and Brancusi represented a relocation of the point of origin of the body's meaning - from its inner core to its surface - a radical act of decentring that would include the space in which the body appeared and the time of its appearing. The sculpture of our time continues this project of decentring through a vocabulary of form that is radically abstract. The abstractness of Minimalism makes it less easy to recognize the human body in those works and therefore less easy to project ourselves into the space of that sculpture with all of our settled prejudices left intact. Yet our bodies and our experience of our bodies continue to be the subject of this sculpture - even when a work is made of several hundred tons of earth.

Wafer's reduced use of form makes the *ova/s* at once easier and more difficult to interpret, as the visual clarity of the oval shapes and the surface articulations are not difficult to appreciate visually, yet meaning and metaphor may confuse the viewer conceptually and physically. James Elkins describes the contrast between seeing the works as bodies with symptoms to be read and their reductiveness as a tension between flesh and geometry. This tension is between bodies closely observed and bodies simplified, and the viewer makes perpetual adjustments between the organic and mathematical.

From an anthropological point of view, the reduced use of form-as-body can be interpreted as a getting rid of 'dirt', as Mary Douglas says, 'Dirt offends against order. Elimination is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment.'<sup>57</sup> Douglas sees dirt as 'matter out of place'<sup>58</sup>, insofar as that dirt is a by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, insofar as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. A semblance of order is created, an imposed system on the inherently untidy experience of the body. This is an attempt at the perfection of bodily form that

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<sup>57</sup> Douglas, 1966, p.2

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*, p.35

is reduced and simplified and symbolising an ideal theocracy as in advertising etc.

Even though the *ovals* refer to aspects of the body, they are largely cerebral in nature. 'The mind/body relation is frequently correlated with the distinctions between reason and passion, sense and sensibility, outside and inside, self and other, depth and surface, reality and appearance, mechanism and vitalism, transcendence and immanence, temporality and spatiality, psychology and physiology, form and matter, and so on.'<sup>59</sup> Wafer's *ovals* refutes these distinctions in adopting and balancing both simultaneously. Yet the body has traditionally been seen as a source of interference in, and danger to, the operations of reason. 'The body is enigmatic because it is not a creation of the mind.'<sup>60</sup> The altered, sculptural body as a body and as the body becomes a site for knowledge and for carrying knowledge, and for the search for knowledge.

Another key concept in studies of bodily representation is the inside vs. the outside. The inside/outside dichotomy is invoked in various ways: the scale and shape of the *ovals* correspond specifically to the human torso or belly and not the limbs or the head. This could refer to a visceral focus. Their taut surfaces are like skins, and in the normal functioning of visible bodies; skin separates whatever is visible from the parts of ourselves that are hidden. Skin is both dividing and divided, at one and the same time inside, outside, and between. The markings on the forms could refer to places on the body where orifices meet the enveloping skin, in what Lacan calls the liminal forms of eyelids and anuses.

The sculptures' simplicity brings to mind an outer shell, protecting or hiding tremendous energy and potential on the inside, a carrier of the antithesis of what it looks like, like a torpedo, a bomb, or the smooth outside yet highly complex inside of the egg. Their appearance is the antithesis of their content. Both torpedo/bomb and egg eventually reveal their inside, whereas Wafer's

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<sup>59</sup> Grosz, 1984, p.3

<sup>60</sup> Gallop, 1988, p.18

sculptures never do, thus they create a sense of unease and negation of knowledge of the interior.

'All the orifices, which play a major role in the transmission and reception of information from the inside to the outside of the body and from the outside to the inside, together with the sexual drives, which find their sources in these bodily openings, induce the sensitivity and thus the privilege of the erotogenic zones for the body image.'<sup>61</sup>

The lustrously smooth surfaces of most African figural sculpture, often embellished with decorative scarification, indicates beautifully shining, healthy skin. Many African cultures view pots as metaphors for the female figure, with such words as shoulder, lip, mouth, belly, and foot used to refer to distinct parts of the vessels. Inherent within the relationship between the female form and the ceramic vessel are concepts of prosperity and wealth, and social and spiritual propagation. When one then considers the intended functions and original contexts of these pots, the vessels are transformed from utilitarian objects into objects symbolizing the people's deepest cultural beliefs. Wafer's oval forms are reminiscent of these pots, yet their 'skin' has been interfered with, altered, marked and ruptured.

'Skin is the locus of both seeing and sensation, and it has several properties that makes it especially interesting for contemporary art practices. It is the traditionally visible portion of the body, and yet it has always been traditionally kept invisible. It is the place where sensations are most sharply delineated in space: i.e., a pain is localized and *visible* on the skin, but diffuse and invisible elsewhere on the body.'<sup>62</sup>

In art, representations of the inside are rare, and generally denote pain and death. The body's barrier is its skin: the skin protects the inside, holds it together and hides it from view. In general, the skin has long been the 'master trope' of the division between inside and outside. Skin is bilateral: it is both

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<sup>61</sup> Grosz, 1984, p.74-75

<sup>62</sup> Elkins, 2003

substance, and a signifying surface and an organ. Prof David Bunn refers to skin as integument: a hardened, organic covering that is both a shield for some imagined inner vulnerability, and a signifying surface that is taken to refer to some inner sign or wider social field.<sup>63</sup> This notion is of the surface heaving with pressure from below, as though from the mass of a buried life. It also breathes, exudes and closes, sometimes a radical colour change occurs to the skin that is a symptom of an underlying condition or emotional experience.

In contemporary practice the skin has become a very diverse metaphor (it is used, for example, in fiber arts, fashion, and painting), and it no longer functions as a simple dividing surface. A better word for the uses of the boundary metaphor in current art is 'membrane': the medical term for the many divisions within the body that *include* skin as a special case.

There are few ways to see 'inside' the body: either via an orifice, or by rupturing the skin or epidermis. Skin is usually a continuous surface, unbroken except for the body's orifices. It is normally impolite even to look at places where the inside of the body becomes visible – the twilight of nostrils, ears, mouths, anuses, vaginas, and urethras. The inside is by definition and by nature that which is not seen.

Mary Douglas writes that bodily orifices sometimes seem to represent points of entry or exit to social units.<sup>64</sup> Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. The bodily margins are often thought to be specially invested with power and danger. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its especially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious (and odious) kind.

In general, a cut or opened surface can be presented as skin, but in normal conditions the smallest abrasion will take the image out of the normal roster of representations of the body and place it within the special class of images that

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<sup>63</sup> Bunn, 2005, p.1

<sup>64</sup> Douglas, 1966, p.4

signify pain or death. Pictures of opened bodies conjure states that edge from pain toward shock, unconsciousness, coma, and death.

Besides alluding to the orifices of the body like the navel, the surface articulations of Wafer's *ovals* may refer to scarification; specifically Zulu body decorations, which involve cutting or puncturing skin to form specific scarred patterns. Certain social hierarchies and belief systems in Zulu culture are reflected in the careful, geometric arrangements of wounds on bodies to produce a patterned and scarified skin. The patterns involved have a deeper conscious meaning for the people concerned.

Wafer's *ovals* can be seen as a hybridisation between a Western perception of the body and the influence of an African idea of body on that perception. The salience of the body may be a uniquely Western construct. The body is transformed beyond a physical state to a psychological state.

'...non-Western body art primarily as a symbolic statement in which the decoration transmits messages about groups or individuals.

By transforming the natural body into the cultural body the individual subordinates himself to the common social values of his group. The body may even become a kind of model of society, which aesthetically communicates customs and role relationships from individual to individual.'<sup>65</sup>

Wafer's *ovals*, as idealised hybridisations of African and Westernised notions, could be seen as such 'models of society'.

Generally, Westerners in the Judaic-Christian heritage regard self-mutilation as a sign of psychopathology and have always taken a malevolent view of its manifestation in both our own and exotic societies. There exists the theory that the primary intention of African scarification appears to be to enhance the individual's beauty, but 'Scarification, perhaps more than any other body art, tends to indicate social status and social structure, emphasizing the continuity

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<sup>65</sup> Brain, 1970, p.15



and way of life of a particular tribal group or class. It nearly always, however, follows aesthetic as well as social canons.<sup>166</sup>

In Africa, however, scarification has a more serious purpose. Even on African carving the marks are often reproduced with great care since they indicate the precise status and identity of the person portrayed in a mask or portrait statue. Most of the marking had been made at special times during a person's life. They can also be a sign of individual status such as royalty. Among many African people, like the Nuba, both boys and girls are scarred on the face after puberty, and this scarring is repeated a few years later. The primary intention of African scarification appears to be to enhance the individual's beauty, though the Nuba maintain that cuts above the eyes aid sight, and those on the temples are said to relieve headaches. It probably addresses both needs.

Tribal marks are usually cut on the face and may be 'hollow' or 'raised' according to the treatment of the wounds. One style is to create open, flat scars, which are not raised by colorants or irritants. The scarification operation for the 'raised' method is performed with two instruments: a hooked thorn to lift the skin and pull it up, and a small blade with which the skin is sliced to produce a protruding scar. Small pieces of dung are sometimes inserted under the skin so as to cause an infection and a scar. The more skin is pulled up before cutting, the higher the resulting keloid. A high keloid lasts longer and is considered more attractive. This method can also produce beautiful patterns, although some techniques result in ugly protuberances as big as tumours.

Scarification was also used as a preventative medicine: a four-pointed star on the right side near the liver was supposed to preserve a man from hepatic infection; in the case of sickness caused through spirit possession, cuts were made all over the body to free the person from the influence, rather like blood-letting or cupping in Western society. Bloodletting and permanent markings on the body like tattooing and scarification are accompanied by pain and are ideal for marking important status changes at critical moments of life, such as

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<sup>66</sup> Brain, 1979, p.70

puberty. The necessity for courage plays a large part in operations which demand proof of the initiate's fitness and endurance. Along with the pain there is the blood. Some societies stress the importance of the piercing of skin and the drawing of blood, the blood carrying away imperfections or the evil contained in the body.

In Africa, both men and women stress the excitement of a beautifully scarified body – the special sensitivity of the scars on a woman's belly or thigh. These marks embellish the body, reshaping and rejuvenating it, in order to present an attractive, sexually satisfying image. Decoration can also disguise or hide unattractive features, thus helping to achieve a degree of consonance with society's idea of the 'beautiful' and 'sexy'. The scarification of a woman's belly is a *rite de passage* and a symbolic representation. Obviously body decoration is frequently blatantly sexual. Many scarification and tattooing marks drew attention to erogenous zones: breasts, buttocks and thighs. Much body decoration converges on the genitals.

The body can be seen as a surface of erotogenic intensity, a product of and material to be further inscribed and reinscribed by social norms, practices and values. The way the primitive body is marked or scarred seems to us, in the West, to be painful and barbaric: there appears to be something facile and superficial about the permanent etching on the body's surface, because we are not so much surfaces as profound depths, subjects of a hidden interiority, and the exhibition of subjectivity on the body's surface denotes exposure. Yet inscriptions on the body surface function to intensify, proliferate, and extend the body's sensitivity, instead of being signifiers of a hidden or inferred signified which is the subject's interiority.

'Welts, scars, cuts, tattoos, perforations, incisions, inlays, function quite literally to increase the surface space of the body, creating out of what may have been formless flesh a series of zones, ridges, hollows, contours: spaces of special significance and libidinal intensity.'<sup>67</sup> What is described is the constitution of erotogenic orifices, rims, and libidinal zones that produce

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<sup>67</sup> Lingis as cited in Grosz, 1994, p.138-9

intensities unevenly over the entire surface of the body, a kind of interweaving of incisions and perforations with the sensations and sexual intensities, pleasures and pains of the body. They constitute some regions on that surface as more intensified, more significant, than others.

These puncturings and markings on the body do not simply displace or extend from already constituted, biologically pre-given libidinal zones; they constitute and relocate the body in its entirety as erotic, and they privilege particular parts of the body as self-constituted orifices. They make the very notions and sensations of orifices and erotogenic rims possible. Bodily markings can be read as symptoms, signs and clues to unravelling a psychical and psychological code.

These incisions, welts and raised scars and graphics are not signs, they are intensive points. They do not refer to intentions in an inner individual psychic depth. Scarification marks in rows, circles and zigzags reverberate with one another and are lined up. They are the incision and tumescence of new intensive points, pain-pleasure points that extend the erotogenic surface. What we have then is a form of spacing, a distributive system of marks. 'They do not form representations and not signifying chains, but figures, figures of intensive points...'<sup>68</sup>

The erotic dimensions attributed by us to genitality are spread in varying intensities over the surface of the body, along the lines of perforation or incision. The mapped, ordered, regulated sequences of patterns, carefully laid out in ritual form, do not, like a nametag, map a particular psyche or subjectivity but designate a position, a place, binding the subject's body to that of the social collective. Cicatrizations and scarifications mark the body as a public, collective, social category, in modes of inclusion or, membership. They form maps of social needs, requirements and excesses. They become visual 'passports' to identify where or what region or place one comes from.

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<sup>68</sup> Grosz, 1994, p.140

The surface or skin of Jeremy Wafer's oval forms has been treated by the use of colour and specifically the triad of red, black and white. The meaning associated with basic symbols – such as red, black and white – may be related to the workings of the subconscious, which are similar in all human beings and of universal significance. The body and its various substances play a fundamental part in all symbolic systems, and at first sight there seems to be a similarity in patterns among different societies. The basic colour triad is found in all body decoration and is available to all peoples. Black is readily at hand to those who have fire, red is primarily obtained from red oxide, and white from clays and chalk.

A particular symbol, such as the colour red, may have a complex series of meanings, yet there may also be one basic to all cultures: red may be associated with blood and life. Victor Turner suggests that among the earliest symbols produced by man are these three colours, which are symbolic representations of the human body. These colour-products are in turn symbolic of important social relations. White is linked with semen or mother's milk and hence reproduction. Red is associated with blood and hence with the mother-child tie, or war and hunting. Black is seen as excreta or decay and associated with death or a transition from one status to another, which may be envisaged as a temporary mystical death.

In this way the colours are made to stand for basic human experiences of the body and provide a classification and symbolism of these experiences involving reproduction (red – blood), suckling (white – milk) and defecation (black – excreta). The three colours white-red-black are not merely differences in the visual perception of parts of the spectrum; they are abridgements or condensations of whole realms of psychobiological experience involving the reason and all the sense and concerned with primary group relationships. For example, red ochre and hematite (named after blood in Greek) have been used in many cultures to smear corpses and bones with a renewing force. The oldest known mining operation in the world – 43,000 years ago in Swaziland – tried to recover this blood stone from the earth for ritual purposes. Mary Douglas has reported on the surviving Zambian

symbolism of black bile, red blood, and white milk in body and nature are part of 'a complex representation of male and female spheres, and destructive and nourishing powers.' She points out, 'Art and the humanities are not sullied by blood and tissues, but given life.'<sup>69</sup> In Africa this is a potent colour triad, which re-appears often.

Allen F. Roberts sees how many Nguni-speaking people celebrate paradox through their use of colour, the red-white-black triad having primacy. Of these, white is the most consistent in symbolism, representing the enlightened, the auspicious, the beneficent, the pure and the good, no matter what its context. Red and black are far more ambivalent. Black is paradoxical, including both potential, privacy, generosity and fertility on the one hand, and pretence, deceit, wrongfulness and the 'dark' and evil arts of sorcery. The violence of red may be destructive or positive energy of raw but nonetheless creative change. Black is insight: a looking inward at what is not apparent but is nonetheless the essence of being – something like the 'natural suchness' of Zen. Black is also an artfully indirect suggestion or insinuation – the gnawing suspicion that an act or event has meaning beyond what one sees.

In Bangwa Cameroon, red is the colour of life, celebration, and joy. Red seems to have a special significance everywhere. Apart from the fact that it is the colour of blood and is readily procurable, red is the primary colour with the longest wavelength perceptible to the human eye, the colour with the greatest natural stimulus value. The preference that some Xhosa groups have for red beads can be linked to the use of red ochre. Red appears to have been the colour of cosmetics which denoted a stable and normal state, and red beads were and are still used in the context of chieftainship.

In the 1996 *ovals* series Wafer used traditional Zulu medicine in the process of sculpting and in the surface treatment. The *African Forms* are black, except for the white and red *African Form 3*. Both the first and third series are finished in either red stoep polish or in red Muti clay called *Ibomvu*. It is only recently that Wafer has also started using red oxides.

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<sup>69</sup> Douglas as cited in Lippard, 1983, p.200

This use of Zulu medicine and in the particular and specific use of this triad of black, white and red colours may refer to what the medicine is used for: both physical and metaphysical dimensions of healing.

In the Zulu kingdom, red ochre had a similarly important function. It was used to dress the tufts of hair or top-knots on the heads of married women, and it continues to be used in divination context to this day. For the obvious reason that it is the colour of (menstrual) blood, contemporary Zulu speakers often associate red with fertility. Although there is no irrefutable evidence to suggest that this colour symbolism necessarily underlies the royal interest in the use of red beads in the Zulu kingdom, it is probably not coincidental that these beads were known as *umgazi*, i.e. blood. The latter designation is particularly interesting given that considerable attention was paid to the potentially powerful role of material symbols in reinforcing a perception of the king's importance in fertility rites like the annual First Fruits Ceremony. The red nodules on the forms are like beads. Wafer often uses beads in his sculptures, as can be seen in the round reliefs in his Goodman exhibition *Measure*.

People in a liminal state apply red ochre to their bodies as a shield, to protect the areas or parts that have contact with the outside world. The red ovals, especially the first three larger one, combine the red ochre colour and the shield-like size and shape.

'So, new ritual boundaries have to be set out 'to close the gate', to establish a new boundary between the truly normal world and the uncertain world represented by an individual in a marginal state. Hence the use of insulating materials e.g. the newly delivered mother and the chief mourner are covered up in a blanket. Later on the newly delivered mother (*umdlezane*) paints red ochre on the exposed parts of her body – the parts that have contact with the ordinary world. She does this in order to protect herself from the dangers to which she is prone and also because she herself is liable to be a channel of danger to others.'<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ngubane, 1977, p.99

Harriet Ngubane's (1977) in-depth writing sheds light on the subject matter. Herbal medicines are administered in a ritual context and have a symbolical meaning.

The medicinal compounds can be divided into three colour categories, namely black medicines (*imithi emnyama*), red medicines (*imithi ebomovu*) and white medicines (*imithi emhlophe*). These colours are used serially in this order. Black is associated with darkness (*umnyama*), and red (*bomvu*) is associated with red ochre (*ibomvu*). White (*mhlophe*) and green/blue (*luhlaza*) are the only two colours that have no association to substantives. Whereas the black symbols represent excretion, death and darkness – all of which are antisocial, the antithesis of society – the white symbols represent life, eating and light. Day and night are divided by the red colours of sunrise and sunset. The dim twilight represents the 'between' position, something of darkness as well as something of light. Because light is pure and unambiguous, red is identified with black, even though black and red do not represent the same thing. Red compared with black represents less danger and more good. Red is not as explicit as black/white (misfortune/fortune). There can be no day or night without the reddish twilight.

The term *umnyama* literally means 'darkness', and darkness of the night symbolically represents death, while the daylight represents life. '*Umnyama*, when used metaphorically to represent death, can be translated as 'pollution'. Pollution, then, is viewed as a marginal state between life and death.'<sup>71</sup> 'Death is sometimes symbolically represented in the treatment of certain types of disease by administering 'black' medicines.'<sup>72</sup> During the period of treatment the patient withdraws from society and behaves like a bereaved person, and is considered to be polluted during this period and their pollution is contagious. While black medicines are dangerous, they are nevertheless necessary to make a person strong and powerful.

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<sup>71</sup> Ngubane, 1977, p.78

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*, p.81

The good things in life, good health and good fortune, are associated with light, which is represented by white. White is meant to promote purity. Yet the colour white can also be used to present what is excessive goodness or excessive power, which is abnormal. For instance, a neophyte has ablutions twice a day and is covered in white clay. A diviner has white strips of goatskin permanently strapped over her shoulders and breast. Mother's milk, which is white and also food, is considered as representing pollution. In a sense the white clay and the mother's milk both represent abnormal marginal situations. One stands for excess of power, while the other represents deficiency of power.

Treatment with such symbolic medicines is intended to correct the cause of illness and to establish a balance between a person and the environment. Once such a balance is established, it must be sustained by another treatment if it is thought to be waning, and if lost it must be regained. Both red and black are used to expel from the body system what is bad and also to strengthen the body against future attacks. To regain good health white medicine is used. Black medicine is for the purging of the internal evil that is the cause of the malady, red medicine as an intermediary step, white medicine as the emetic that restores purity and balance. The practitioner endeavours to restore balance by driving a patient out of the mystical darkness by black medicines, through the reddish twilight of the sunset by red medicines, and back into the daylight and life by white medicines. This is a continuous process or transformation, rather than an opposition between black and white. Heat is represented by black or red, while the cooling is represented by white.

Black and red are said to be equivocal, in that they stand for both goodness and badness; white represents only what is good. Because black and red share certain attributes one of them may be omitted, in which case either black is followed by white or red followed by white. Whenever red or black is used it must be followed by white, whereas white can be used alone without being preceded by the others.



Wafer is clearly mindful of the symbolism of the colour triad black-red-white. Its collateral logic is readable by both African and European cultures. The sculptures could thus symbolise the movement through 'evil' Apartheid (black) via the elections (red) into the New South Africa (white), and can be brought into context by referring to Wafer's statement that these forms were made whilst he experienced a politically euphoric state of mind: the *ova/* sculptures take on the hybridised visual manifestation of a unified South Africa.