Material Bodies and the Complications of Desire

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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March 2017
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis/project is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed. I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship

Tassia Joannides

March 2017
Acknowledgements

Firstly I wish to thank my amazing supervisory team—Senior Supervisor Dominic Redfern and Second Supervisor Laresa Kosloff. Thank you for your support and critical engagement with my project, for prompting and extending my thinking, for your generous time, discussion and advice. I am grateful for your encouragement to frame (and claim) the content of this project in my own words. I have grown measures because of this, and am a better artist and researcher for it.

I acknowledge the contribution of past supervision by Keely Macarow, Robert Baines and Ian Haig, who each brought different insights to my project along the way. I thank Ian for his continued support and advice throughout my candidature. Additionally I’d like to thank Sophia Errey for pointing me in the right direction towards significant texts on fashion and culture, and Benjamin Lignel for bringing the term ‘affordance’ into my awareness and practice.

Funding from the Australian Postgraduate Award enabled me to begin this project without financial concern, and my fellow teaching staff made it possible for me to teach and complete this PhD with their professional support. I also acknowledge the support of funding from RMIT towards exhibition expenses and conference travel, which enriched my project.

It has been my pleasure and fortune to have co-directed the Research Exchange at RMIT for four years, where interdisciplinary research conversations have inspired my thinking. Thank you to all who have been involved in this peer-to-peer initiative, and for those who have organised and participated in the parallel program Thinking Through Practice. I am privileged to have worked alongside a diverse and engaging research community over the past six years. In particular I thank Tarryn Handcock, Sarah Edwards, Peter Burke, Grant Hill and Renee Ugazio, for their friendship, feedback, support, and collaborations on projects along the way.

My involvement in groups and collectives has stimulated my project, and I’d like to thank the members of MAKE collective, PART B research jewellery collective, and Geoff Hogg and the extended Centre for Art Society and Transformation (CAST) community.
To the extraordinary group of artists I am lucky enough to now work with in the *Triple F collective*—Sofi Basseghi, Paula van Beek, Yu-Fang Chi, Vanessa Godden and Riza Manalo—I look forward to our upcoming and future collaborations.

I am grateful for my dear friends and family, thank you for your understanding, love and encouragement that helped keep me going, with biggest thanks to Mum and Dad for listening and providing unconditional care and support that made my life better on this challenging but wonderful journey. Thank you for instilling in me the confidence to dream and the persistence to keep going.

Finally to my incredible partner David Potts. Thank you for your endless patience, advice and love. Thank you for always being able to make me laugh, and for believing in me. I will never be able to thank you enough for enabling me to complete this mammoth task. You can definitely go get that puppy now.

---

RMIT ETHICS APPROVAL: CHEAN B-2000675-04/12

This PhD received copyediting and proofreading advice from Katie Poidomani from Edge Editing in accordance with the guidelines laid out in the university-endorsed national guidelines for editing research theses.
Abstract

This practice-led research project investigates visual representations of female sexual identity within Western popular culture. It draws on a broad range of sources including historical research of feminism and feminist theory, art and design, clothing and fetish, social media, film and television, advertising and the music industry. It examines and responds to persistent cultural stereotypes regarding female desire, focussing on the role of materials that accompany and embellish sexual narratives.

The project seeks to expand the ways that normative signifiers of sexuality can be interpreted. This is examined and tested in a series of artworks that consider the relationships between sexualised bodies and materials. The creative outcomes include sculpture, photography, performance and wearable objects.

Through heuristic and embodied making processes, the project reveals the ways in which materials can be appropriated to expand representations of female sexual and sexualised subjectivity. The signifying potential of these materials was enhanced and modulated through the use of humour, framing and paradox within the creative outcomes.

The research builds a deeper understanding of the ways materials are integrated into our understanding of female sexual stereotypes, and expands the ways that material signifiers have been utilised across the creative fields of visual art, fashion and craft, contributing new forms to ongoing feminist discourse in the arts.
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INTRODUCTION

This practice-based research project is concerned with the stereotypical and sexualised visual representations of female sexual subjectivity, paying particular attention to the material signifiers that regularly accompany images of sexual and sexualised women. It examines the body as a material, and the potential of materials to suggest sexualised bodies. For example, consider the power of a corset to prompt desire; even when a corset is not on a body its seductive materiality and form are visibly and culturally linked to sexual narratives. My project uncovers the limitations and potentials of materials and the body in constructing new narratives of female sexual identity, responding to the saturation of visual representations of highly sexualised female bodies-as-objects within Western popular culture.

The dominance of sexual imagery in visual popular culture can be partially attributed to the increasing trend of female self-objectification currently visible via online platforms and supported by celebrity culture. This is problematised by the popular notion that looking sexual is the same as being sexual, a message that is repeatedly present in television and films, advertising and the music industry.

What we once regarded as a kind of sexual expression we now view as sexuality (Levy 2005, p. 5, italics in original).

Through this project, I aim to highlight the complex nature of female desire, investigate its past and present visual representations and contemplate its changing relationship with feminism. At the commencement of this project feminism was often characterised as a contentious issue that many chose not to identify with. Websites such as <http://womenagainstfeminism.com> became platforms for young girls to express their motives for being ‘anti-feminist’, posing with handwritten statements such as: “It isn’t the 50s
anymore. We’re already equal. I don’t want special privileges over men”.¹ Many of these sentiments were supported and popularised by female celebrities publicly identifying as non-feminists, including popular music icons Katy Perry, Lady Gaga and Kelly Clarkson.² These examples illustrate a continuing emergence of contradiction and complication in contemporary feminism, indicating a need for further investigation and understanding.

Reflection on the developments and setbacks of feminist history, the project was difficult to situate within a singular feminist viewpoint. At once both attempting to support a contemporary feminist position, while simultaneously seeming to sabotage its feminist roots, the project grapples with the contradictions faced by many women today (myself included) about how to be a ‘good feminist’ and what exactly that might mean.

This project is an attempt to wrestle with some of these complicated ideas; it is an intimate and complex enquiry of identity, both singular and collective. It deals with layered considerations, and deliberates intersections between the body and desire, sexuality and gender.

This PhD is informed by Judith Butler’s differentiation between sex and gender, which identifies sex as a biological make up and gender as a constructed identity (Butler 1990). While sex and gender previously fell within the established binary of male/female, I acknowledge this to be expanded,

¹ Quote from an image on the website Women Against Feminism (2017), authors name not revealed. See Fig. 1 for other examples of handwritten signs on the website.
² In the years to follow many would renounce their statements once they were better informed.
with variations of both sex and gender in existence. Although I feel strongly that gendered terms are generally overused and potentially inhibiting, for the purpose of this dissertation it has been a necessity to use gendered terminology to distinguish between people who are perceived as women and those perceived as men, and how this affects the way they are framed within visual culture and Western society. While the area of study has largely addressed stereotypes, it is hoped that the outcomes expand perceived norms and are accessible to a wide and diverse audience.

At its core the research is informed by my own experience of being perceived as a woman, and my experience of perceiving other women. It examines the disjunction between cultural representations of female sexuality and the subjective experience thereof. For this reason, the term sexual/ised is used throughout the dissertation to describe both the individual experience of sexuality, as well as the cultural construction of sexualised female bodies.

Throughout the project, I have continually considered a central question: can material signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality be appropriated within artworks to expand representations of sexual/ised female subjectivity?

This question is addressed via three research aims: to uncover and investigate the material signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality; to explore the boundaries of such signifiers through practice-based experiments; and to create artworks that utilise the new knowledge of material signifiers to expand existing representations of female sexual/ised subjectivity.

The first chapter, Material Bodies, summarises key feminist history and theory that is significant to this project. It is not a comprehensive overview of feminism, rather it details the areas of interest to the research, and is divided into two key sections. Firstly, I examine the historical framing of women’s bodies for viewing pleasure and consider the role of the spectator in the framing process, citing essential contributions from John Berger, Laura Mulvey (via Freud and Lacan), Judith Butler and Naomi Wolf. Their writing is used to support my re-positioning of the antiquated male gaze as a cultural
gaze, one that contemporary Western culture exploits to encourage the continued sexualisation of female bodies.

The second section considers the consequences of the cultural gaze on female sexual/ised subjectivity, and provides examples of increasingly sexual/ised self-representations of young women via the Internet. This is framed by writing from Ariel Levy and grounded by writing from Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir. In this chapter I highlight the shifting terrain of female sexual/ised subjectivity and illuminate the need for sustained work on gender equality now and into the future.

In Chapter Two, Material Signifiers, I investigate and uncover material signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality, citing examples from popular culture, fashion, soft-core pornography and contemporary art. I discuss how the female body and its parts operate as signifiers, before examining the role of clothing and dress, and their relationships with sexual representation. I refer to key texts on this topic including Seeing Through Clothes (Hollander 1993) and Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power (Steele 1996) to reveal the pivotal shift in perception brought about via the appropriation of fetish wear into mainstream apparel. This key example demonstrates how woman as a visual source of desire can be transferred to materials through relational (and often sexual) interactions, imbuing certain materials with symbolic value. I further demonstrate how materials can substitute and suggest the sexual/ised body through discussion of strategies in art and the music industry that expose or subvert stereotypical representations, such as Lady Gaga’s expanded representations of stereotypical female sexuality. The signifiers identified in this chapter therefore include a range of materials and objects that generate inspiration for the creative outcomes described in the following chapters.

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3 I propose that the male gaze has now been appropriated by culture, an idea that is further discussed in the first chapter.

4 Here the use of the term soft-core pornography refers to pornographic photography or images or videos that are less explicit than hard-core pornography. Examples that will be discussed include photographs of women’s bodies in sexually revealing poses that are framed as self-expressionistic and empowering, yet operate within the phallocentric pornography realm.
These first two chapters essentially form the rationale for the project, while also providing a review of relevant literature.

Chapter Three, *Material Considerations*, details my initial material case studies\(^5\) and provides a brief overview of my artistic background highlighting a shift in methodologies for this PhD project. Methodologies were customised for the complexities and scale of this project as it expanded out of my initial field of practice (contemporary jewellery) and into a practice without boundaries; an interdisciplinary practice where new materials, processes and thinking had to be established. This process began with four material case studies, each examining a particular material and its potential to perform as a signifier of stereotypical female sexuality, while also testing representations of the naked female form in experiments that include photography, wearable objects, sculpture and video. The results of these studies reveal the substantial impact of the naked female body and suggest its ability to produce narratives linked to desire beside any material. This finding encouraged me to challenge this in future projects by experimenting with the clothed body, and sculptural forms that substitute the body (or suggest bodily qualities).

Following the experimental case studies, Chapters Four, Five and Six describe the three major creative projects undertaken during the PhD, documenting the processes involved and their exhibition outputs. Highlighting the creative development of each work and supplemented by un-exhibited trials and tests, these chapters articulate the exploration of my research questions via practice-based investigations. As the creative works progress through trials of different modes of practice, a range of artists are discussed from corresponding fields.

In Chapter Four, *Liquid Bodies* (Project 1), I explore the potential of hot glue to connect to narratives of female sexuality within sculptural forms, as well as examining the role of gendered bodies within the photographic frame in a

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\(^5\) The method for the case studies is explained in detail within the chapter and consists of a hybridised case study model that is only loosely based on social science models.
series of three photo shoots. Methods of working with hot glue are covered in
detail, documenting the novel techniques trialled that contribute to material
knowledge.

I examine the notion of bodily and material affordances, citing definitions by
James Gibson and Donald Norman,\(^6\) as well as my own expanded definition
and use of affordance within the project. I reflect on how affordance enables
me to suggest an absent body and provoke desire to interact with materials.
Artists working with similar strategies of affordance are discussed along with
key inspirations from popular culture that demonstrate related subject matter,
contextualising my works amongst an expanded community of practice.

A photo essay in the centre of the chapter aims to highlight the critical process
of *thinking-through-making*.\(^7\) Through this series of experimental images I
reveal part of my making process that is best described visually, rather than in
language. Returning to text I discuss a second and third photo shoot, which
incorporate both male and female bodies as I attempt to soften
representations of gender binaries. A final series of four printed photographs
supported by a large wearable sculpture revealed an outcome that not only
softened, but also essentially removed any sexual/ised content. I describe the
significance of this outcome in enabling me to identify the parameters of
sexual/ised narrative, which provided new insights for subsequent projects.

The fifth chapter, *Embodied* (Project 2), highlights a series of works across
three separate media that operate in the now identified middle ground
between overt and absent sexual content. *Sticker Series*, a duo of
photographs that capture a performative process of adorning the skin, reignite

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\(^6\) Bodily affordance is a key strategy within the project and refers to the design of things that allows for
or invites some form of bodily interaction. This notion is expanded on within the chapter, which refers to
the key texts: Gibson J 1977, 'The Theory of Affordances' in S Bransford (ed), *Perceiving, Acting and
Knowing: Toward an Ecological Psychology*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., New Jersey; and

\(^7\) Throughout the project I have taken thousands of photographs of the creative processes undertaken.
These images speak more clearly and articulately about the work than I ever could, and are intricately
connected to my study of framing devices. I have therefore included a large amount of photographic
documentation, but for obvious reasons have had to curate them for this dissertation. The Photo Essay
is included to give the reader some insight into my visual thinking process.
a sexual/ised narrative by emphasising visible flesh. Body Badges, a participatory performance where I bring my own female body into the gallery space for public interactions, investigates perceptions of a female body framed within the gallery space. Finally, in the Embodied Series, a group of five ambiguously wearable neckpieces made from second-hand bras exploit bodily affordance and introduce formal, material and cultural narratives that engage multiple readings.

Historically significant works of female performance artists from the 1960s and 1970s are reviewed, including Hannah Wilke, Carolee Schneemann and Yoko Ono, as well as works of current and emerging female artists both locally and internationally, and across a range of fields. By engaging in three modes of practice myself, I compare visual representations of the female body in photography, performance and sculptural works. Through practice-led research, I discover that the bra works can elicit complex and surprising narratives, which open up possibilities for expanded representations of sexual/ised female subjectivity.

The sixth chapter and solo exhibition, Divulge (Project 3), consists of a series of six sculptural works employing second-hand bras, mesh, bicycle tubes and haberdashery materials. The works explore the complications and contradictions of such complex phenomena as desire, sexuality, and identity. Artists including Tracey Emin, Sarah Lucas and Louise Bourgeois, are discussed in correlation to the creative works produced, comparatively situating my works with others who deal with the sexual/ised body.

Installed in a way that encourages visible bodily relationships between the sculptures and other bodies in an exhibition environment, these works grapple with issues that face the next generation of feminists, commenting on the complications of being in a gendered female identity that is intricately intertwined with cultural and material signifiers. I describe how this final body of work embraces paradox and ambiguity, and demonstrate how these strategies engage with multiple narratives by inviting expansive (rather than singular) narratives of sexual/ised female subjectivity via material outcomes.
The conclusion reflects on the trajectory of the PhD research, uncovering pivotal themes and ideas that grew out of the research, including the significant role of seductive clothing and dress, the enticing character of the playful and peculiar, and the expansive potential of multiplicity and contradiction. These themes have been central to my increased understanding of female sexual/ised subjectivity, and how it can be investigated through, and materialised within, creative outcomes.

The project contributes a collection of new artworks via the three major projects—*Liquid Bodies, Embodied* and *Divulge*—supported by this written dissertation. It contributes new discourse within the field of interdisciplinary art practice, and impacts upon the areas of contemporary craft, fashion and textiles.

The artworks generated from this PhD research project reflect the time that they have been produced in, by drawing on a range of research from a wide assortment of sources from peer-reviewed journals to social media sites, and music video clips, film, television, as well as material investigations, works of art, craft, design and fashion. It has been motivated by the many representations of female sexuality in the realm of popular culture, and is informed by my own observations and personal experience of being perceived as a female. Blending together these diverse influences this project considers representations from the past, focuses on the now, and looks forward into the future.

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8 These were further supported by many additional group exhibitions (as well as artist’s talks and conference presentations), which are not detailed in the dissertation so as not to be repetitive, as some cover similar terrain, and others push outside the parameters of the research. These are visually presented at the end of the dissertation, along with additional documentation of research outputs produced during the PhD, which demonstrates where the research has entered public discourse.
Chapter 1
MATERIAL BODIES

This chapter summarises key feminist theory and history that has influenced this research project. It is not a complete overview of feminist theory or a chronological synopsis. It discusses a specific selection of key ideas that contextualise the artworks presented in the following chapters. These artworks reflect my aim to illustrate the multiplicity of female sexual/ised subjectivity through an exploration of the visual symbology of clothing and specific materials within Western popular culture.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first examines the way that the female body has historically been framed and viewed, and how this differs from the viewing of male bodies within Western popular culture. It also considers the role of the spectator (male and female) and their experience of viewing and relating to gendered bodies, citing essential theoretical contributions from John Berger, Laura Mulvey (via Freud and Lacan), Judith Butler and Naomi Wolf. It uses language from their texts to support my own conclusion that the male gaze has now developed into a cultural gaze, a gaze that coerces both men and women to indulge in viewing women as objects of visual pleasure.

The second section considers the result of the cultural gaze on female sexual/ised subjectivity, examining the upsurge of female self-objectification (particularly online) and the increasingly sexual/ised representations of young women. I postulate as to what some of the causes might be and draw on theory from Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray and Ariel Levy amongst others to assist my investigation into sexual/ised female subjectivity.

My practice is informed by this rich history and theory that concerns the female body and the way it is viewed, controlled, performed and experienced, and draws on my individual understanding and interpretation of theory concerning female sexual/ised subjectivity.
Looking at the Body: Gender Performance and the Cultural Gaze

This project started with an interest in the visual representation of the female body. Within my art practice, my own visual language has been largely shaped by my acute awareness of images of the female form. I have been collecting images of women for over twenty years, mostly in postcard format, but also oddities like candles, tins or bottles, artworks, books and clothing (see Fig. 2). I have a specific interest in imagery that alludes to female sexual identity and the way women are often visually framed to evoke desire.

Fig. 2: Images of my private collection, 2016.

During the early stages of my project two key texts were identified that I have regularly returned to when contemplating the way that women are visually framed as pictures. John Berger’s influential book *Ways of seeing* (1972) and Laura Mulvey’s seminal text *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) express ideas that have repeatedly provoked my thinking. While approaching the gendered and framed body from different perspectives relating to art history (Berger) and film (Mulvey), both reach similar conclusions regarding gendered representations of bodies. Reviewing European art history Berger formulated that “Men act and women appear” (1972, p. 47, italics in original).

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9 This article was originally published in 1975 in Screen 16.3 Autumn by Oxford University Press (pp. 6-18), however throughout this dissertation I will be referencing from a more recent publication *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, published in 1992 of which *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* appears as a chapter.
Mulvey’s focus on cinema revealed a parallel conclusion, stating that the male character “articulates the look and creates the action” (1992, p. 28) while women “freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” (1992, p. 27). Both statements frame men as active and women as passive, a concept Mulvey connects to Freud’s theories of gender difference, where he details masculine and feminine traits. However, Mulvey and Berger’s language differs from Freud’s, as they emphasise a visual focus on women’s passivity.

In *Ways of Seeing*, Berger identifies a history of looking at women, a focus that can be seen as a hangover from the traditions of the nude in European oil painting, where “women were the principle, ever-recurring subject” (1972, p. 47). It was also a reflection of the cultural conditions of a time when women were considered as property to men; hence it was not difficult to frame women as objects rather than subjects. Berger notes, “to be born a woman has to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men” (1972, p. 46). This confined space is one of visual emphasis, constructed for the *male gaze*. Coined by Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, the *male gaze* refers to the gaze of the spectator (always presumed male) onto male and female bodies on the cinema screen, with particular focus on the way the female body is presented to connote “to-be-looked-at-ness” (1992, p. 27).

Mulvey draws on Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis to outline two pleasures in viewing: voyeuristic and narcissistic, explored exclusively in her text in relation to the male spectator. His experience of viewing female bodies (his voyeuristic pleasure) neatly aligns with Berger’s explanation of the female body as object for looking at. This differs greatly from the complex experience of looking at oneself (his narcissistic pleasure), particularly when it is mediated by the screen (as is the focus in Mulvey’s text). Here Mulvey refers

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to Lacan’s mirror phase, implying that the male spectator identifies with the male film star whom he sees as the mirror/better version of himself. Man does not look at his like for voyeuristic pleasure, as Mulvey postulates, “the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification” (1992, p. 28). This makes sense if we understand the male role as active subject, rather than passive object. He sees himself as active, and therefore has no need to notice the visual qualities of his presence; these are reserved for the female characters, whose form is “displayed for his enjoyment” (Mulvey 1992, p. 28).

In addition to highlighting the characteristic visual representation of women, Mulvey posits that cinema “builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself” (1992, p. 32), thereby emphasising the complicit role of cinema in controlling the gaze and structuring the way male and female characters are to be looked at. This way of looking is now so familiar to us that we often take the spectacle for granted, not just in cinematic viewing, but also in our viewing of gendered bodies in daily life, a practice that my PhD interrogates through various explorations of female sexual/ised subjectivity.

In the following section I draw on Mulvey’s afterthoughts on her critical essay, which addresses the previously neglected perspective of the female spectator, and postulate about the way women experience and apply their own gaze. As will be reviewed, Mulvey posits that it is with an appropriated male gaze that women look at gendered bodies on screen, and I suggest that this extends to how women look at other bodies (as well as their own) in everyday life (not just as film spectators). Berger placed some initial language around this theory when he described how “Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at” and suggested that “The surveyor of the woman in herself is male” (1972, p. 47). In other words, she looks at herself with the male gaze and is constantly aware of her own presence. So not only are men looking at women, women learn to look at themselves. Berger elaborates:

Mulvey’s interpretation of Lacan’s theory of the mirror phase is described as a stage in the child’s development where he sees himself in the mirror for the first time and assumes his reflection to be a more complete version of himself. See key sections in Mulvey, pp. 25-26 and p. 28.
In the art-form of the European nude the painters and spectator-owners were usually men and the persons treated as objects, usually women. This unequal relationship is so deeply embedded in our culture that it still structures the consciousness of many women. They do to themselves what men do to them. They survey, like men, their own femininity (1972, p. 63).

But this is more than a case of self-surveillance, as Berger suggests. It is a cultural and political acceptance of a male gaze as the only gaze possible.

In *Afterthoughts on “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” inspired by Duel in the Sun* (1988), Mulvey shifts her focus from the male gaze to the commonly overlooked mechanisms of female spectatorship. She contends that the female viewer uses the male gaze when she empathises with the role of the male hero in film, and relates this theory to Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of femininity. It is important to understand that Freud’s analysis of femininity mostly consisted of looking at the male body as normal and the female body as complicated and deviating from the male norm.12 Freud theorised a period of childhood where both women and men experience the same sense of play and action, described as the masculine phase. In this dichotomy, woman must eventually leave this phase behind as she learns to become submissive to the man and her masculinity is determined (Mulvey 1988).

This is an intriguing assessment, for Freud appears to position man as human, while woman is set up in opposition to man (as a deviation) and is therefore somehow less human. The masculine phase represents a phase where one can indulge in all manner of human activities without limitation. However, once a woman leaves this phase behind to become feminine, her basic human behaviours must be moderated. Although Freud firmly places women into the feminine role, he concedes that she will sometimes go back

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and forth between masculine and feminine behaviours during her life (Mulvey 1988). Mulvey describes this as "trans-sex identification" (1988, p. 72), which she says often becomes second nature for women, but is not an identification that sits easily. Mulvey’s main theoretical proposition is that women employ this transgender identity to recall the masculine phase from their childhood, allowing them to enjoy watching films with the male gaze, thus they can enjoy the action and sympathise with the male hero (Mulvey 1988). Following this we can assume that the female viewpoint is typically (and often unconsciously) predetermined by the overpowering patriarchal gaze, a cultural gaze guided by consumer concerns and the desires of Western popular culture. I propose the term cultural gaze as one that defines a cultural (rather than distinctly male) attitude towards looking at gendered bodies that conforms to the prioritisation of men’s desires over women’s. Even today, women’s desires are largely misunderstood and misrepresented, a topic approached in Sara Pascoe’s new book Animal (2016). Pascoe has researched sexual difference in animals focussing historically on the largely unrecorded female desires expressed in the animal kingdom.

If you believe without question that female animals derive no pleasure from mating, that intercourse is something they just simply endure to beget children, then you’ll ignore a jungle full of female animals displaying desire and initiating sex. They’ll be invisible, obscured by foliage and preconception, and poor old Western civilisation will spend decades entrenched in misunderstanding. We’ll accept that sex is something that happens to women, something that is performed upon us, rather than by us. Despite being fifty per cent of the cast, we’ll be props, rather than actors, and we have been (Pascoe cited in The Guardian 2016, podcast at 3:18).

It is not difficult to recognise Pascoe’s anger about the harms caused by a male-centric history, which ignored the possibility of female desire, even when faced with animal evidence such as peacocks, where "males had big beautiful tales because peahens fancied the guys with the prettiest feathers" (Pascoe cited in The Guardian 2016, podcast at 2:20). Pascoe’s brazen words echo a
generation of women that are fed up with having their sexuality (both visual and experienced) described and prescribed to them, and who now want to express their sexuality, even if it is unclear as to what and how that might occur.

Modern women have been betrayed by science; we have been lied to and about. They stole our autonomy, they vanished our pleasure, and the effects are so embedded, the words of experts so respected, that the revolution of reclamation will be slow and difficult (Pascoe cited in The Guardian 2016, podcast at 3:53).

The saturation of imagery of self-objectifying sexual/ised female bodies on the Internet demonstrates that women are seeking to take ownership of their sexual identities. Representations of the gendered and sexualised body have never been so prolific. But many of these representations are continuing stereotypical gender expectations, where women are repeatedly represented in particular visual ways that prescribe gender and beauty norms. Although we are now seeing an increase in the objectification of male bodies, the mainstream attention (or cultural gaze) of popular culture remains fixated on women and their bodies.

In 1990, as the third wave of feminism was building, Judith Butler injected a radical idea into the conversation of sexual difference with the publication of her ground-breaking *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. In it Butler insisted that gender (as differentiated from a person’s biological sex) is entirely constructed and performed. Today we might recognise the performance of gender in terms of particular stereotypes within male and female categories. Butler (1990) described such stereotypes of gender as the “performance” of gender, and implied that gender is not embedded within our sex, but a production of our culture.
Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth* (1990) was released in the same year as *Gender Trouble*, and claimed the beauty industry was to blame for perpetuating women’s obsessive focus on beauty stereotypes. Wolf uncovered the devious tactics of the industry, such as how advertisers were able to censor representations of women who did not conform to profitable beauty ideals from appearing in magazines (or they would withdraw their advertisements and therefore their funding). Wolf highlights the detrimental effects on women’s sense of self-worth in trying to live up to the widely promoted beauty expectations. According to Wolf, beauty was being used as a modern form of control over women’s bodies (and time), which she likened to the ideas expressed in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), wherein Betty Friedan asserted that women were being sold the dream of domesticity, when in reality it was unfulfilling for many women, instead keeping them trapped in their homes.

Just as domesticity and beauty have required focussed attention in the past, I propose that it is within the current climate of social media and increased online content that female sexuality now requires our consideration. Within this context, I position sexual/ised female subjectivity as the visible and pressing issue facing current feminism. As women emerge from a long history of misrepresentation, how will we take ownership of our individual images and experiences of sexuality? I suggest that it is with an open, honest and personal lens that women contribute to the conversation concerning their sexual/ised subjectivity, and allow for multiple voices, experiences and representations to emerge and be seen. This PhD project attempts to make visible my own observations of female sexual/ised subjectivity, and illuminate the confusion and complications resulting from a culture that has characterised female sexuality via the male gaze.

14 I am framing this as a central issue in comparison to beauty and domesticity within Western society, but wish to acknowledge the existence of many other pressing issues for feminism more broadly, such as sexual discrimination and reproductive rights, as well as issues facing women from other cultures, which lay outside the scope and context of this project.
This chapter has thus far focussed on analysing the way women’s bodies have been looked at in modern history under the patriarchal gaze. Through the writing of Berger and Mulvey we have seen the historical focus on the male gaze, gained insight into the female spectator, and concluded that a cultural gaze is presently manifest in Western society.

In current Western popular culture the male gaze remains a bedrock motif and women have acclimatised to its presence. So much so that they have adjusted to this way of looking and now use it to look at each other. The male gaze has become the cultural gaze.

In the following section I hypothesise as to why this may be occurring while drawing on the writing of Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray and Ariel Levy to expose young women as increasingly self-objectifying, and the developing sexual/ised nature of this phenomenon. I connect this to the notion of a cultural gaze and use examples from popular visual media to discuss the complications of female sexual/ised subjectivity.

**Female Experiences of Body: A Culture of Sexual/ised Subjectivity**

The advancement of the Internet is enabling women to take control of their own image in ways that have never been possible before. However, while there are positive explorations of female subjectivity being represented on the Internet, there are overwhelming volumes of representations of women who are not electing to eradicate the cheesy porn style images that were originally created for a male-centric culture; in fact, they are repeatedly embracing it, and many now consider it ‘empowering’. Websites such as <www.suicidegirls.com> (Fig. 3) subscribe to this popular representation of woman: woman who is pleasured by her own image.
This phenomenon is confusing, and something I am personally at odds with. It undoubtedly contributes to the continuation of gender and beauty stereotypes, as well as the performance of women in the role of object/Other. Conflictingly, I am captivated by images of sexual/ised women, such as those presented on the SuicideGirls website, and there appears to be a great deal of pleasure being achieved through the process of self-objectification. What creates this pleasure? Why would women perpetuate a stereotype that keeps them supressed?

Simone de Beauvoir attempted to grapple with the way women repeatedly preserve their role as Other in her seminal text *The Second Sex* (1972). Beauvoir outlined the prevailing beliefs that identify man as the *subject* and woman as the *Other*, leading her to ask: “Why is it that women no not contest male sovereignty?” (1972, p. 18) and to question where this submission might come from. These are questions that have repeatedly arisen within my project, and I have wrestled with various answers along the way. Beauvoir offers some possible explanations. Amongst these, she cites religion (as constructed by men); mythology (Adam and Eve, Pandora’s Box, etc.); and anti-feminists (who insist that men and women are equal, but different, which Beauvoir says is not equal at all; difference equals segregation and therefore inequality). Repetition of gender performance (as described by Butler) should also be considered a cause, along with the complications of female desire itself.

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15 It is worth noting that *The Second Sex* was first published in French in 1949, significantly earlier than it was translated into English and published in 1972.
In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey draws on Lacan’s theory of the mirror phase: the moment where a child recognises himself in the mirror as “more complete, more perfect than he experiences his own body” (1992, p. 25). Mulvey replaces the mirror with the cinema screen to explain the male spectator looking at the male film star as a mirror/better image of his self. This ‘better self’ was displayed in an active male role. An opportunity arises to explore the potential of this theory if we consider the subject as female instead of male (as Mulvey neglected to at the time) and ‘the mirror’ as the stereotypical representations of women in popular culture. In addition to viewing glamorous women in cinema, women are also bombarded with pictures of “beautiful” celebrities and models via the magazine industry. Such magazines allow women to escape the reality of their own lives, in a function comparable to watching a film. Flicking through the pages, each page acts like a mirror, where the spectator (here presumed female) looks at her more glamorous like. Her *more complete* reflection is more attractive rather than more able. In this way, Lacan’s theory can be used as a way of explaining women’s desire to continue the performance of gendered subscription to beauty norms. It also supports Butler’s theory of gender performance as propelled by repetition, as it demonstrates women responding to the role they see themselves realising within images, such as those in magazines.

Within this PhD project, a magazine style aesthetic is subconsciously evoked in early projects, but challenged as projects progress, as focus increases on expanding representations and questioning the function of the image frame. Women’s magazines are identified as one area where a specifically female spectator is the intended focus. Here, her gaze is the only gaze, but it is her gaze as already predesigned by men. Wolf would argue that it is also controlled by corporations who thrive on the continued insecurity of women, relying on their desire to comply with the ideal image of beauty by acquiring enhancing products (Wolf 1991). Significantly, it is now common for products to do more than just bring you closer to the beauty ideal, in addition to being “beautiful” women must also now be *sexually* attractive in increasingly overt displays of their sexual difference. But who is this sexual/ised subjectivity for? The self or the spectator?
As a result of women continually being viewed by the cultural gaze, consumer and individual understanding of the difference between feeling desire and feeling desired has been affected and somewhat distorted. This does not minimise or trivialise its validity, but is certainly a complication for the future of feminism. As Rashida Jones\textsuperscript{16} describes, there is a “difference between sexuality and sexualisation” (cited in Krupnick 2015). This phenomenon has been contextualised by writer Ariel Levy, in her 2005 book \textit{Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture}. In it she identifies female chauvinist pigs as the problematic trend of women objectifying each other and themselves, and her theory of \textit{raunch culture} as the mainstream infiltration of porn and sexual stereotypes into everyday life through visual media (Levy 2005). She uses the example of \textit{Girls Gone Wild} (GGW), an American television show popular around the time of the book’s publication, where cameramen approach young women who respond by flashing their breasts or kissing each other (usually in exchange for a free GGW hat). This is viewed as normal and acceptable behaviour amongst many American teenagers that Levy interviews, almost a “rite of passage” (Horn cited in Levy 2005, p. 8), and considered “liberating” for women according to the show’s male founder Joe Francis (cited in Levy 2005, p. 12). Francis goes so far as to compare the young women flashing their bare breasts to the feminists who burned their bras in the seventies (cited in Levy 2005 p. 12), a concept I find difficult to entertain. It seems more likely that the young women are performing their sexuality in ways they identify as normal practices within Western popular culture, rather than from a deep connection and understanding of their own desires and expressions of freedom. As one young girl interviewed by Levy put it “I’d never do that really. It’s more for show. A polite way of putting it is it’s like a reflex” (cited in Levy 2005, p. 11).

Levy defines raunch culture as a reaction to past failures of feminism, in particular the unresolved issues between the feminist movement and the sexual liberation movement. She suggests that it is also a backlash against

\textsuperscript{16} Rashida Jones is co-producer of \textit{Hot Girls Wanted} (2015), a documentary about young women in legal amateur porn. Directed by Jill Bauer and Ronna Gradus, initial release Bloomington USA.
some of the ‘uptight’ values of feminism as well as political correctness, and has led to a “tawdry, tarty, cartoonlike version of female sexuality” (Levy 2005, p. 5) penetrating mainstream visual media. While once confined to the male sphere, raunch culture is now embraced broadly and perpetuated through the music industry, television and film, art, and fashion. It has become the norm in the representation and experience for a new generation of women, a new form of gender performance.

…the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing [sic] of a set of meanings already socially established (Butler 1990, p. 191, italics in original).

Butler’s emphasis is not only on the re-enactment, but also the re-experiencing of gender, highlighting that it is not simply a continued performance, but also a way of feeling, identifying and being in the world. This repetition within culture is particularly difficult to modify, and it is easy to see stereotypes being cyclically taught and learnt by each new generation, if not between individuals, then between young minds and an overwhelming consumer culture.

Consumer culture continues to reinforce and strengthen sexualised gender stereotypes, using women’s bodies and their potent sexuality as the central cog in the machine of visual culture. The power of female sexuality is displayed in the roles women play in film, by their presence as objects in advertising, and their sexualised behaviour in the music industry. These examples are mimicked by other women who constantly survey themselves, self-regulating their looks and behaviour to align with gender and beauty norms. Berger was aware of this when he wrote:

…a woman’s self [is] being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself . . . From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually (1972, p. 46).
American artist Hannah Wilke was acutely aware of this gaze upon her female body, which she commented on in her revealing quote “even in my sleep I was posing” (1992 cited in Jones 1998, p.153). Wilke unapologetically explored what was considered female narcissism in her artworks, often using her naked or partly clothed body in performative works that addressed her as both object and subject. For example, her 1977 performance video *Intercourse With…* where Wilke is the subject in the film (identified as we listen to tapes of her friends, family and lovers leaving messages on her answering machine) and simultaneously viewable as erotic object (as she poses and then undresses). In many of her works, Wilke was using her own contemplative gaze upon herself, and also commenting on the way she felt gazed upon. Wilke is a fascinating example as she neither celebrates nor openly critiques the mechanisms of the male gaze. She appears to court it with curiosity, ultimately leaving the viewer to decide. Her failure to deliberately and undoubtedly critique the male gaze brought widespread criticism and landed her the label of narcissist by many art critics, including Lucy Lippard and Elizabeth Hess (Jones 1998, pp. 171–175). However, Amelia Jones re-branded Wilke’s work as “radical narcissism” (Jones 1998), due to the transformative potential of Wilke’s work when viewed as phenomenological body art.\(^{17}\) Jones described how Wilke’s “obsessive use of her own body in her work in fact produces a narcissistic relation that is far from conventional or passively ‘feminine’, turning this conventional, regressive connection of women with narcissistic immanence inside out (even as it reiterates it)” (Jones 1998, p. 175). Although Wilke did not make explicit a critique of the male gaze, she undoubtedly brought it into question. Her ongoing inquiry into her self-image was pursued up to her death, when images of her posing as an ill and “less beautiful” figure forced many critics to re-engage with her work.

Wilke’s images can be understood as politically tolerant of the role she assumes as object and focus of the gaze, and perhaps her works even

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\(^{17}\) For further writing on this subject see ‘Chapter 4 The Rhetoric of the Pose: Hannah Wilke and the Radical Narcissism of Feminist Body Art’ in *Body Art: Performing the Subject* by Amelia Jones.
present the possibility of finding pleasure from such attention. While Wilke was widely chastised for her apparent self-love, the strategy has been revisited recently by young feminists with new ideas about presenting the sexual/ised female body in artworks.

Artists such as the Melbourne based collaborative duo DIRTY FEMINIST (Vanessa Howells and Tyler Payne) create works that “highlight and celebrate overt female sexuality” (Howells & Payne 2013), however their naked bodies could be understood as performing for a specifically male gaze. Perhaps this is the “sexualised fun” they refer to when outlining their rejection of “the dichotomy in which they feel forced to choose between feminism and sexualised fun” (Howells & Payne 2013).

I question the politics of constantly reiterating the stereotypes of women posing (especially when it was already achieved so powerfully by Wilke), but these young artists’ work should be viewed within the current culture of online material that surrounds it. Women (who have historically had the potential of their sexuality suppressed) are now free to explore their sexuality in whichever way they choose, even if that means they want to perform for male desire. Luce Irigaray expresses her concerns regarding this phenomenon:

That she may find pleasure there in that role, by proxy, is possible, even certain. But such a pleasure is above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon man. Not knowing what she wants, ready for anything, even asking for more, so long as he will “take” her as his “object” when he seeks his own pleasure. Thus she will not say what she herself wants; moreover, she does not know, or no longer knows, what she wants (1985, p. 25).

Perhaps it is this not knowing of one’s own (female) desires that produces the persistent repetition of a familiar, gendered performance—where gestures and experiences are routinely modified to prescribe to a male gaze—rather than the construction of a gaze that could be considered specifically female.
American director Jill Soloway brought attention to this subject in her significant keynote address at last year's Toronto International Film Festival (2016), boldly approaching the point that it is over 40 years since Mulvey coined the term *male gaze*, and no-one has conceptualised an idea for a female version. She therefore provided her first offering of what a *female gaze* might look like.

Soloway summarised Mulvey's definition of the male gaze as structured in three parts “the person behind the camera, the characters within the film itself, and the spectator” (2016). She therefore constructs a definition of a female gaze into the same amount of parts, beginning with part one “*feeling seeing*” described as a way of filming with focus on the feeling of the protagonist, rather than the action. Part two aims to capture the feeling of being seen, to be the object of the gaze. The third part “returning the gaze” is an active acknowledgement of being seen, and powerfully claiming it, so as to reject it. This final phase enables the protagonist to shift from object to subject (Soloway 2016). Soloway attempts to consciously utilise her vision of the female gaze in her own directing. There is evidence of this in her significant series *Transparent*, which tackles the complicated issue of a father (played by Jeffrey Tambor) who comes out as transgender late in life. The narrative includes the gendered and sexual experiences of the other members in the family, bravely exposing the complications and difficulties that they each experience. Yet Soloway’s concept of the female gaze is even more clearly executed in her more recent series *I Love Dick*, which tells the complex story of a heterosexual couple who become obsessed with a charismatic man. The plot places emphasis on the desires of the female lead (played by actor Kathryn Hahn who also stars in *Transparent*).

I see Soloway's speculation on what a female gaze could potentially be, or become, into the future as an inspiring proposition. However I disagree with the underlying premise that there is such a thing as an inherent female or

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18 *Transparent* was created for Amazon Studios and debuted in February 2014 and has so far produced three series with a fourth planned for release later this year.

19 *I Love Dick* first aired on Amazon in May 2017 and is based on the 1997 novel *I Love Dick* by Chris Kraus.
male gaze at all. I prefer to understand gender as a construct, and therefore believe that while we have currently developed a cultural gaze that appropriates a male gaze guided by Western culture, a new way of gazing will become established in the near future, one that everyone (male, female, straight, gay, lesbian, queer, transgender, etc.) can take ownership of when seeing, being seen, and when framing others to be seen. I attempt to respond to this through my creative outcomes and this dissertation, by acknowledging multiple perspectives and playing with traditional mechanisms of the male gaze.

In response to an audience question at the end of the talk, Soloway admits that the term “female gaze” is itself problematic, and ponders other potential titles instead of female: “other”, “queer”, “trans”, “feminine”, “feminist” … (Soloway 2016), demonstrating that the notion of a specifically female gaze remains highly complicated.

I theorise that female expressions of sexual/ised subjectivity will continue to be confused for some time as women attempt to reconcile with a largely misunderstood sexuality. After all it was only in recent years that the clitoris was finally represented as a complete organ thanks to Australian doctor Helen O’Connell, who has been dissecting and measuring the clitoris to uncover its surprisingly large (internal) size (Johnson 1998). Previously the clitoris has been inaccurately drawn and described, leading to much confusion and speculation, such as over the controversial G-spot, which is still being investigated today. O’Connell reveals that her research of the clitoris uncovered many inaccurate accounts: "Sometimes the whole structure is drawn as a dot" (cited in Johnson 1998). Surprisingly to many, the clitoris has now been discovered to be have legs five to nine centimeters long, extending out from the recognisable element of the “dot” with two bulbs either side of the vaginal cavity (Johnson 1998; Buisson et al 2008; Jannini et al 2010). In addition, many believe that female orgasm is achieved via a combination of mind and body, such as Dr Kinsberg who states “the location of the G-spot is

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20 For further reading see Buisson et al 2008; Jannini et al 2010.
more likely found in a woman's brain than in her vagina” (Kinsberg cited in Jannini et al 2010).

Irigaray highlights the multiplicity of female erogenous zones and how they were unable to be understood properly as they did not reflect man’s well-studied genital areas:

What might have been, ought to have been, astonishing is the multiplicity of genital erogenous zones (assuming that the qualifier “genital” is still required) in female sexuality (1998, p. 64, italics in original).

In Western history, female genitals have largely remained taboo, an area to be kept hidden. However the new generation of Internet savvy young women are disclosing their genitals to the world in surprising self-expression. In addition to SuicideGirls, other websites, such as <http://www.ishotmyself.com> provide a platform for women to express their nude bodies on their own terms. The website explains:

What inspires women to submit their naked photos online? The short answer is—Control. The ability to show yourself on your terms, how you’d like to be seen, free from the distortion of someone else’s viewpoint and the sanitizing of Photoshop (I Shot Myself 2001).

The site emphasises that the women displayed are not models, and that the idea of models “offends most of us who will never have the flawless complexion and sculptured body parts that mainstream media and the porn industry (and their image enhancement tools) tout as being uniquely desirable” (I Shot Myself 2001). Yet one look at the site displays their overwhelming bias to young, attractive and mostly white females. It also specifically outlines participants must be cis-female, and while it boasts its ability to allow women to portray themselves on their own terms, membership comes with a contract where women must guarantee they are “confidently naked in all the photos, not concealing [their] nudity”, that they photographed
“all parts of [their] body” as well as being “engaged with the camera”—the site stipulating that they “don't count pictures where you're distracted, squinting, frowning or bored” (I Shot Myself 2001). It seems that having control of your self-expression still comes with conditions for women when it comes to the 'right' way of showing their sexual/ised bodies. It is important to note that these examples are operating within a specific new area of the pornography industry, one that seemingly makes sexual objectification of female bodies appeal to men as spectators, and women as supposedly empowered and liberated (both as object of the gaze, and as spectator of it).

While I continue to be baffled (but simultaneously titillated) by the trend of women constructing their sexualised narratives via modes of display, I continue to question the impact of this trend of self-objectification, and wonder if it is leading us towards strengthening gender roles (and therefore inequality). However, female sexuality has been prescribed and policed for such a long time that I believe it is now time for women to work this out for themselves, even if the journey is a little complicated. Moving forward we must make space for multiplicity in sexuality and representations of it to exist and prepare for the expansion of sexual representation. This approach was applied within the creative outcomes of this PhD, through the inclusion of female bodies (often my own) and material signifiers of female sexuality.

This chapter has endeavoured to highlight the shifting terrain of female sexual/ised subjectivity, and to summarise and expand on selected theory and history that has brought us to this point in time. This content, including psychoanalysis, gender stereotyping and the waves of feminism, informed my
political and personal connection to my project. It illuminates the need for continued work on gender equality, and motivates my desire to make work that expands this conversation.

While current Western society is considerably better informed and aware of the mechanisms of gender stereotyping, knowledge of it does not appear to be altering or damaging general repetition of gender performance. Mulvey claimed that her intent in writing Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema was to assist the destruction of beauty stereotypes, suggesting, “it is said that analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it” (1992, p. 24). Sadly for Mulvey, the clichés have not been destroyed, but continue to be strengthened, not only by men, but also by women, who are now using the devices set up by the traditions of cinema to ‘frame’ their own bodies within an eroticised mise en scène.

As women perpetuate their objecthood through images where they signify desire, they become a symbol for their own sexuality where ultimately the woman is no longer needed, only her image. Sometimes a substitute for women’s sexuality is enough to generate desire—a stiletto heel, a dressing table covered in make-up, a silk petticoat thrown on a bed. I wonder: where does woman end and signifier begin?

This chapter has delved into some of the psychological workings of desire and a history of the female body as framed for viewing pleasure. In the next chapter I will explore the material elements attached to the framing of eroticised female bodies, highlighting that the body is not in isolation when it is gazed upon, but involved in a complex relationship with signifiers and codes associated with desire.
Chapter 2
MATERIAL SIGNIFIERS

Now that we have discussed the nuances of looking and being looked at, in this section I will examine the materials that are associated with the stereotypes of female desirability and desire, as they relate to my central research question:

Can material signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality be appropriated within artworks to expand representations of sexual/ised female subjectivity?

In order to answer this question effectively, this chapter will look at an underlying splinter question: what are the material signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality? In response to this, an overview is provided of the historical implications of clothing on perceptions of female sexual/ised subjectivity. The appropriation of fetish wear into mainstream fashion is cited as pivotal, and I draw on key texts on this topic including Seeing Through Clothes (Hollander 1993) and Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power (Steele 1996). This is followed by reflection on some specific examples of material signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality and how they operate within popular culture, fashion and contemporary art.

To avoid the potential overuse of the phrase material signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality, I will hereafter use the term signifiers of desire. This allows for ease of readership and also enables focus on the sexual nature of the materials being investigated. Through this chapter I map the signifiers of desire from the source: woman, to the substitute: materials. As this chapter reveals, the materials considered are firstly closely linked to the female body, (such as fetish wear), but become more banal as I investigate the potential of materials to gain symbolic value through cultural associations and the power of suggestion (where the qualities of material signifiers become central).
This journey is mapped out in the body of the text and supplemented by notes from my working folio, where I have generated lists of words that helped me to think through ideas about signifiers of desire. Within the section titled ‘The Female Body’ I have included a list of female body parts that I perceived as related to the visual narrative of desire, alongside a list of their material elements. In the following section ‘Clothing and Dress’ I have listed clothing, make up and accessories to the same effect, again followed again by a list of material elements. Finally, in the section titled ‘Substitution’ a mind map is provided of the qualities and characteristics of the identified material signifiers of desire, so as to cultivate these qualities within artworks. The lists are scanned pages from my working folio and are included for some context of my working process through this period of investigation.

The Female Body

Chapter One discussed one of the most visual and historic signifiers of desire: the female body. As a singular object the naked female body is a potent signifier of desire, but it can also be broken down into body parts (such as feet, breasts or thighs) or by external materials (such as skin, hair or nails) that each exist as individual potential signifiers. In the following chapters, each of these is investigated in artworks that consider the visual aspects of the flesh as a material, as well as the female body in parts and/or whole. The artworks aim to determine the ability of the naked female body to express themes of allure and desire, while simultaneously exploring the role of other (non-bodily) materials to the same effect. The visual qualities of the female body are considered in detail, as it is her visual presence that has been historically (and currently) strongly connected to ideas of her sexualised subjectivity. Below is an initial list that I constructed of female body parts and materials considered as potential signifiers of desire. This list was based on my understanding of how I saw female bodies represented in popular culture, particularly film. It is important to see this list as a part of my thinking process, rather than as an exhaustive list of findings. At this early stage of the research
I was more interested in my own perception of such signifiers, and in reflecting on the influence of Western popular culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual/ised Female Body Parts</th>
<th>Materials</th>
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<tr>
<td>BREASTS</td>
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<td>BUTTOCKS</td>
<td>HAIR</td>
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<td>THIGHS</td>
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<td>CALVES</td>
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<td>MOUTH</td>
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<td>TONGUE</td>
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<td>DÉCOUTAGE</td>
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**Fig. 5**: Notes from my working folio, 2011. List of female body parts and materials I perceived as connected to the visual representation of stereotypical sexual/ised female subjectivity.

Within their “traditional exhibitionist role” Mulvey defined the appearance of women as “*coded for strong visual and erotic impact*” (1992, p. 27, my italics). Interpreting this coding is a feature of my research project, which considers the details that assist in the transformation of women into objects for looking at. For example, in cinema particular tropes of framing and lighting are continually applied when presenting the female figure. She is often posing (held still, rather than in action) and the frames focus on particular sexualised body zones\(^{21}\), such as those examples I have listed above (Fig. 5). Female skin is often lit so that it appears to glow, a soft, dewy complexion is presented as flawless, lips lightly glossed and pouting\(^{22}\).

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\(^{21}\) This is illustrated in the famous scene of Ursula Andress emerging from the water in a small bikini in the first Bond film *Dr. No* (1962, directed by Terence Young). She moves slowly so we can visually take in her figure, focusing on the sexualized zones, her body is broken down into consumable parts before we consume her as a whole. This scene is revisited in a more recent Bond film *Die Another Day* (2002, directed by Lee Tamahori). This time the scene is literally slowed down as Hally Berry’s voluptuous body breaks through the surface of the water and she sashays towards the shore, emphasizing her hips as she moves. We watch her through the eyes of James Bond, admiring her through binoculars with a voyeuristic male gaze.

\(^{22}\) A classic example of this in contemporary popular culture is the way Megan Fox is presented in the film *Transformers* (2007, directed by Michael Bay). She is “*coded for strong visual and erotic impact*” (Mulvey 1992, p. 27) by her wardrobe (including tiny denim shorts and low cut tops to reveal cleavage), and her make up (applied heavily for a mechanic), indeed the entire mise en scène surrounding her (straddling a motorbike in a dirty workshop). It is all constructed to fulfill a clichéd heterosexual male fantasy and subscribes heavily to the traditions of the male gaze.
At the centre of the gaze of popular culture, women are encouraged to maintain a constant visual presence of allure. While her naked flesh is a constant foundation for the exhibition of sexual/ised subjectivity (as demonstrated by the SuicideGirls website discussed in the previous chapter), this project also engages with the potential of other materials to elicit desire, ones that can be placed on or beside the body. This includes traditional body-associated materials such as clothing and accessories, as well as other materials that are not usually associated with the body.

**Clothing and Dress**

Nakedness of course has its own fierce effect on desire; but clothing with nakedness underneath has another, and it is apparently even more potent (Hollander 1993, p. 85).

Anne Hollander cites how clothing can provoke desire, however desire can also be provoked by wearable objects and other types of adornment (such as tattoos or make up) that we use to cover our naked selves. In fact, many materials can be used to either cover or reveal the body in evocative ways. Items such as stilettos and corsets have been used in visual imagery to illustrate the narratives of desire and allure, almost so that they have become visual symbols of these themes. Depending on individual taste and experiences, countless wearable objects and materials can provoke desire, however some items of clothing and dress are more potent in their allure and potential to convey erotic suggestion. For example, clothing such as high heels, satin nightgowns and lacy underwear are regularly employed in visual imagery of sexual/ised women, who are further decorated with wearable signifiers such as specific types of make-up (red lipstick, dark eyeliner, face powder) and other body adornment such as jewellery, piercings and tattoos. The below excerpt of notes from my working folio shows lists of some of the more obvious items of clothing and dress associated with stereotypical female sexuality, and the materials they are commonly created from (Fig. 6). In addition, some objects that can be held or carried can also enhance the mise
en scène of desire, such as guns or cigarettes, which contribute to a narrative of danger and excitement. Within certain sub-cultures, even prosthetics are considered as erotic substitutes for the female form.\textsuperscript{23}

Collectively, our cultural understanding of wearable objects and materials as sexually suggestive is largely influenced by celebrity culture, and by the

\textsuperscript{23} Prosthetics are included here as they are widely connected to the fetishisation of individual female body parts. Although they are not commonly used as a signifier of desire in popular culture, I am interested in how these particular fetishes operate visually, such as in fetish magazines and pornography.
overwhelming visual material presented in cinema and television, advertising
and the Internet, and fashion—both haute couture and everyday apparel.
To further understand this, I examined how clothing and dress can play a role
in our psychological interpretation of desire. In particular, I was interested in
the findings of cultural historian Valerie Steele in her book *Fetish: Fashion,
Sex and Power* (1996). Fetish clothing and objects are a key consideration for
this project due to their power to suggest a sexual narrative. However, this
project is not concerned with the nuances of the subversive sub-culture of
fetish, rather it is focused on the way fetish iconography has been
appropriated into mainstream fashion and apparel, as well as the reasons for
this occurrence.

Steele charts the expansion of fetish wear into mainstream fashion,
illuminating the role of popular culture in influencing fashion trends and
acceptance. Steele cites key examples such as Michelle Pfeiffer's Catwoman
costume in the film *Batman Returns* (1992; Fig. 7) as a pivotal popular culture
moment that affected the shift in fashion, along with Madonna wearing John
Paul Gaultier’s famous ‘cone bra’ on her *Blonde Ambition Tour* (1990; Fig. 7).
As more celebrities and films featured fetish wear on sexual/ised female
bodies, the more acceptable it became within fashion, and we now see
corsets, stilettos and other fetish items integrated into everyday apparel.

![Image removed due to copyright restrictions](image1)
![Image removed due to copyright restrictions](image2)

**Fig. 7:** (left) Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman in *Batman Returns* (1992). Directed by Tim Burton; (right) Madonna wearing John Paul Gaultier on her *Blonde Ambition Tour* (1990).
Steele suggests that one reason for the popularity of fetish elements in women’s fashion was that it increased feelings of empowerment, acting as a vehicle for women to feel strong and tough, while simultaneously sexy and seductive. Steele connects this to the provocative nature of fetish fashion, linking it to the youthful desire for rebellion.

The growing popularity of fetish fashions within the wider culture is directly related to the charisma of deviance. Evil, rebellion, danger, and pleasure exert a powerful emotional appeal (Steele 1996, p. 193).

But with each generation needing to up the ante to achieve more shocking sexual representation, how much sex is too much? How kitsch can the clichés become? Music videos are one outlet where these boundaries are continually tested and pushed, with women repeatedly playing the role of sexualised object as support for a male singer or even as independent female artist. Examples of this can be seen in Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams’s famous film clip for the song *Blurred Lines* (2012), which caused uproar over the misogynistic lyrics, including “you know you want it”. The clip depicts the two male singers fully clothed while female models dance around almost naked (and in the now banned original version they actually were naked, aside from a flesh coloured G-string. See Fig. 8). Yet, it is more common that the woman as signifier of desire is clothed (or at least partially clothed) in materials and accessories that enhance her sexual allure. Female artists such as Nicki Minaj visually embody female sexual stereotypes within the music industry. For example, Minaj’s film clip *Anaconda* (2014) where she joyously pours whipped cream over her cosmetically enhanced bust (Fig. 8) complete with ‘sexy maid’ costume—one of the many sexual clichés used in the clip, which also includes footage of her ‘working out’ in a pink G-string, twerking in the jungle, and giving a male model a lap dance. It is interesting to note that this won the MTV Video Music Award for Best Hip Hop Video in 2015. It seems shocking that this sort of objectification of the female body, which relies so

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24 ‘Twerking’ is a popular modern dance move of thrusting the bottom up and down while in a squatted position.
heavily on the tropes of pornography, would be celebrated and supported so publicly.

Fig. 8: (left) Robin Thicke and Pharrell Williams, _Blurred Lines_, 2012. Still image from film clip; (right) Nicki Minaj, _Anaconda_, 2014. Still image from film clip.

While I would describe Minaj’s public image to be one that plays heavily on pornographic representation, other female artists in the music industry are playing with stereotypical signifiers of desire in more interesting and challenging ways. Lady Gaga, for example, does not conform to normative ideals of beauty and desire, although she references them regularly in the creation of her visual identity. The signifiers of desire are blown out of proportion in many of her costumes, so much so that they become grotesque or bizarre. In the video clip _Telephone_ (2009), signifiers are played with: hair curlers are replaced with Coke cans, and instead of smoking a cigarette, she wears sunglasses made from cigarettes, smoke increasing to waft from them as she kisses a fellow (female) prisoner in a prison scene (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9: Lady Gaga, _Telephone_, 2009. Still images from film clip.
These examples critically reflect on the manner in which items of clothing and accessories are utilised to accompany the female body and emphasise its sexual presence within Western popular culture. These items assign cultural meaning to the identity of the objectified body underneath. When viewed together, the body and material signifiers of desire clearly communicate sexualised narratives to spectators. Just as the naked female body can be increasingly sexualised when partially clothed, so can materials that signify desire be enhanced when placed on or beside the body. However, what’s interesting is that these signifiers often also appear to have sexual agency when isolated.

American artist Sarah Charlesworth interrogates the individual agency of these signifiers in her series of images titled *Objects of Desire* (1983–88), inspired by and created entirely from magazine images (Fig. 10).

![Fig. 10: Sarah Charlesworth, Objects of Desire, 1983–88, cibachrome with lacquered wood frame. Courtesy of Sarah Charlesworth Estate.](image)

Although Charlesworth has cut out the body from the images, she has left us with its representation, imagined underneath her chosen material signifiers. These signifiers include items such as blonde hair and a red scarf, which Charlesworth says “we as a culture use to articulate desire” (Charlesworth cited in Felshin 1995, p. 78). She has simplified the signifiers down to their basics—satin dress, white singlet, underwear—this simplification allows us to clearly identify the signifiers without distraction. At the other end of the spectrum, Lady Gaga’s film clip is an explosion of signifiers, overwhelming the
visual space with an excess of amplified (and modified) clichés. Both scenarios can be read as producing simultaneous celebration and critique of the signifiers of desire. Prominently displayed as features of each visual outcome, the strange isolation of the signifiers of desire in Charlesworth’s work encourages us to question their role. This is similarly achieved in Lady Gaga’s film clip by the substitution of unusual materials in place of the signifiers.

**Substitution**

Substitution functions on multiple levels within this project. Firstly, the signifiers of desire are often regarded for their role as substitute for the female body, for example the satin dress highlighted by Charlesworth that becomes a stand in for the sexualised female body. Secondly, this project considers the potential of alternative materials to act as substitutes for material signifiers of desire, for example Lady Gaga’s substitution of Coke cans for hair rollers. This project therefore focuses not only on the more popularised signifiers of desire (as identified by Charlesworth), but also explores banal materials and their potential to convey desire.

So far, this chapter has considered the splinter question: *what are the material signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality?* And, in response, discussed the material elements of the female body and of clothing and dress. When considering substitution for these seductive materials, I wanted to identify some of their key visual qualities, which are outlined in the below notes from my working folio (Fig. 11). These characteristics—such as shiny, flexible, or flesh coloured—are considered and employed when thinking about substitution throughout this project.
Fig 11: Notes from my working folio, 2011. List of qualities I perceived as connected to the visual representation of stereotypical sexualised female subjectivity via specific materials.

In the following chapters I investigate if and how other objects and materials might have similar effects and qualities, and where the limits of erotic suggestion might lay. The works produced also question the problems associated with representing desire in popular culture that strongly relate to the representation and continued performance of gender roles.

I set out to identify common material signifiers of desire and thereafter use these signifiers as stimulus for creative outputs. This will be explored in the following chapters through an account of my interdisciplinary project, which includes experimentation across performance, photography, sculpture and installation.
Since Marcel Duchamp’s ready-mades25 paved the way for use of domestic objects in art practice, contemporary artists have engaged with a wide range of materials for the purpose of creating artworks. As the ready-made demonstrates, everyday objects can be considered materials for use within art practice to explore new material outcomes and semantic possibilities. Within this project, the term materials refer to an expanded definition of the term—one that includes everyday/banal objects as materials that can be transformed via a creative making process. This chapter begins by contextualising my practice in relation to material transformation, noting examples such as Senga Nengudi and Gijs Bakker, as well as a brief overview of my artistic background, which highlights the shift in materials and methods for this PhD.

In the previous chapter materials and objects were identified that act as visual signifiers of desire in Western popular culture, such as clothing, accessories and indeed the female form itself. As was discovered, these materials are imbued with meaning based on recognisable signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality, as represented in film, cinema, television, advertising, fashion, pornography and magazines.

In this chapter, four material case studies (utilising a hybridised case study method outlined below) explore the potential of materials to engage with narratives of female sexual/ised subjectivity through the production of creative prototypes. These material case studies were conducted at the beginning of this research project to further explore the role of materials in the perception

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25 Marcel Duchamp pioneered the use of ‘ready-mades’, a method of utilising common items, such as a bicycle wheel or urinal, and exhibiting them in an art context with little alteration to their appearance. For further reading on Duchamp and the readymade see Capon, E 2009, I Blame Duchamp: My Life’s Adventures in Art, Penguin Lantern, Victoria; or Cabanne, P 1971, Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, Thames & Hudson, London.
of sexualised bodies. Each case focused on a single material: plastic fan frames, mesh, lipstick and crepe paper. Only one of the materials (lipstick) is a stereotypical signifier of desire, while the others are investigated for their potential to act as substitutes.

It is worth emphasising that the pieces produced were not intended to be finished artworks, rather they were tests that allowed spontaneous experimentation with the sexualised agency of materials and the visual representation of desire. It is through these case studies that some initial parameters were set and the substantial impact of the naked female body and the image frame was fully recognised.

Material and Methodological Background

This PhD project is informed by my background within the field of contemporary jewellery, where my practice was situated for over ten years prior to commencing this project. Throughout this PhD my practice has evolved to include interdisciplinary focus and activity, enabling the development of a new language for my work, which now operates across fields as an expanded interdisciplinary practice. This project is therefore located within the field of contemporary art, yet it will also be of significance to the fields of contemporary craft, and fashion and textiles.

Previously my work focused on relationships between materials and the body, and how different materials respond to the body’s movements. For seven years I worked almost exclusively with rubber, a material that inherently conjured notions of fetish and seduction. This was used in subtle and non-confrontational ways via the practice of body adornment (see Fig. 12 and 13).
This PhD project therefore marked a point of departure within my practice to engage other materials, and attempt new material innovations. I suspected that the addition of other materials would offer increased potential for new discoveries, while also extending my material vocabulary. I was interested to see if the subtle narrative of allure evident in my early works would translate when using other materials, particularly banal, non-precious materials and objects that could be transformed and renewed.

During the 1970s African-American artist Senga Nengudi worked with everyday materials as both a statement about capitalism (using cheap common place materials) and as a way of evoking the body. Her most significant series *R.S.V.P.* (first exhibited in 1977) was produced using stockings and sand (Fig. 14). These pieces demonstrate a clear connection to the female body, highlighting its elasticity and simultaneously its constriction inside gendered clothing. Nengudi’s sculptural works also suggest sexualised aspects of the female body, and often incorporate other alternative materials for art making.
Within the field of art jewellery the use of non-precious materials is common today, but was brought to prominence during the 1960s and 1970s. Artists such as Gijs Bakker (Netherlands) challenged the existing perception of material value with pieces such as *Pforzheim 1780* (1985), a neckpiece made from a laminated photographic image of a ‘precious’ necklace (Fig. 15). The photographic documentation of *Pforzheim 1780* being worn on the naked torso of a female figure has been reproduced in many jewellery books as an iconic design artefact. In *Jewelry of our time: art, ornament and obsession* (2000), American writer Helen Drutt observes that many artists of this era created jewellery that functions more ideally as photographic images rather than as jewellery. Drutt suggested that jewellery should be judged, not when “posed for a photograph, but [when] used, moving with its wearer” (Drutt & Dormer 2000, p. 120). In the context of jewellery, I agree with Drutt that an object’s function reveals its success or failure, yet there is something else revealed in these photographs of worn objects, which may not be about jewellery at all. Perhaps the photographs reveal something about materials, or the body, or both?
Photography of objects being worn on the body was experimented with in much of my earlier works, creating images that demonstrate how alternative materials can interact with the body (such as how a flexible rubber necklace falls over a shoulder. See Fig. 16). For this PhD project I moved away from a didactic use of photography to investigate how particular interactions between materials and the body might enhance and expand perception of female sexual/ised subjectivity. I envisaged from the beginning that the outcomes of this research would incorporate a combination of objects, photography, video and/or performance, and that the expansion of methods would propel my PhD investigation towards innovative discoveries.

**Multi-case Study Method**

The following material case studies were the starting point for this project in terms of creative tests in the studio. A new methodology was developed for these studies that combines a case study method (based on social science) with the more fluid methods of heuristic process. The heuristic process has guided much of this project as a methodology that privileges tacit forms of knowing and intuition as essential tools for extending knowledge. It also highlights the personal journey of the researcher, acknowledging their centrality to the research, which relies upon their initial perception and eventual communication.
What appears, what shows itself as itself, casts a light that enables one to come to know more fully what something is and means. In such a process not only is knowledge extended but the self of the researcher is illuminated (Moustakas 1990, p. 3).

Throughout this dissertation I have immersed myself in the heuristic process, utilising all information available to me, including a wide range of written and visual material from reality television shows to peer-reviewed journals, feminist symposiums and conversations over coffee. Taking in information from such a wide net, I designed this series of four case studies to begin to place boundaries on the research and to test initial intuitions of my own.

In an attempt to structure the case studies, they were initially to be based on the model provided for social research projects, outlined in such publications as The Good Research Guide (Descombe 2007) and Case Study Research: Design and Methods (Yin 2009). However, such methods rely heavily on strict adherence to process, which would have restricted spontaneity. Therefore, I approached the case studies from a heuristic perspective, removing specific aims to allow for deviations to occur. In essence, a case study model was used as a base structure, which was then modified accordingly to suit this research project specifically.

Unlike traditional case studies, I am not attempting to prove a hunch or follow specific rules. In fact, this series of case studies was viewed as an opportunity to produce creative outcomes that embraced unforeseen outcomes, even if it travelled outside the desired parameters. In this early stage of the project, my aim was not to predetermine the outcomes, but to allow a heuristic process of making to guide the process, allowing for experimentation and serendipitous outcomes. The term ‘case studies’ is therefore used as a title for this group of experiments, rather than to align it with a specific method. It also assists in the understanding of materials as individual cases, which were studied in isolation.
Each of the four case studies focused on investigating a single material: fan frames, mesh, lipstick and crepe paper. The aim was to examine the potential of each material to act as a signifier of desire, and to experiment with a range of creative outcomes. Within these studies, I considered material qualities (via a variety of hand fabrication techniques), framing mechanisms (via photography and video) and the possible perceptions of materials and their meanings.

Some loose parameters were set in place to anchor the case studies, including focus on the individual material to be investigated in conjunction with the body, and a restriction on the colour palette.

Colours such as red and black can accentuate seductive narratives, and were therefore chosen as the palette for the case studies (which also continues through projects in the following chapters). Black was selected as the focus, as an iconic signifier of desire amplified within Western culture by style icons such as the ‘little black dress’, and a historic focus on the glamour of pale flesh and black evening wear. The exhibition Black in Fashion: Mourning to Night (2008; National Gallery of Victoria) was largely focussed on the allure of black clothing and its strong association with desire and seduction. Assistant curator, Paola Di Trocchio describes how the “darkness of black gave connotations of misbehaviour” (2008, p. 67), supporting Valerie Steele’s discussion of “the charisma of deviance” (1996, p. 193) cited in the previous chapter. This is demonstrated in the fetish world where black boldly dominates, prominently utilised for most clothing items as well as accessories.

In addition to a consistent colour palette, a consistent body would be utilised where required. I elected to use my own body, rather than involve participants for these tests, enabling me to work intuitively with my body and the materials.

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26 The little black dress (also referred to in popular culture as the LBD) is widely considered an essential item for a woman’s wardrobe.
The process for each case study involved three steps:

1. Rationale for material selection
   Including reflection on material qualities and potential symbolism.

2. Material experiments
   Including documentation (such as photography and/or video) of the experiments either substituting or engaging with the body.

3. Reflection
   Reflecting on what was discovered about the physical qualities of the material and/or its potential as a signifier of desire.

Although these case studies each produced a large volume of sculptural and wearable prototypes, along with copious visual documentation, I have condensed this to only a few images for the purpose of focussing on the key outcomes and discoveries of each case study.

Case Study 1: Fan Frames

RATIONALE FOR MATERIAL SELECTION
On a research trip to Japan in the year prior to this project commencing, I purchased a bulk amount of black plastic fan frames from Japanese craft store Tokyu Hands. The fans drew my attention due to their material qualities, such as the shiny plastic, and the potential for shapes to be manipulated. When overlapped, the lines of the fans created an appealing moray effect that created a seductive allure relevant to my line of inquiry.

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27 Tokyu Hands is a Japanese department store that sells mostly craft products and materials.
MATERIAL EXPERIMENTS

The fan frames were initially deconstructed via processes of cutting with scissors and sawing with a jeweller’s saw frame. The pieces were then restructured using various techniques, creating an assortment of new components (Fig. 17). These were then used to construct a series of three large neckpieces (Fig. 18). In this initial case study, I relied on jewellery methods as a starting point into the project, however once the pieces were complete, a new method was introduced of photographing the pieces on the naked body in non-traditional ways (Fig. 19). I also produced short videos, which highlighted the moray effect displayed when the fans were overlapping in movement (Fig. 18).
REFLECTION

The video works were immediately discarded as they displayed little potential for development. While I had initially been drawn to the moray qualities of the overlapped fan frames, this quality did not end up conveying the strong sense of allure that I had hoped for. Even when situated interacting with the naked female form, I suspected that the materials and constructed forms were not responsible for the sexual/ised narrative—this was emerging from the framing of the female body within the photographic image. Elements of fetish, magazine aesthetic, and fashion were all being used to enhance a seductive quality, leading to a relatively clichéd and stylised series of images.

The material itself proved difficult to work with, as the stiffness of the hard plastic did not allow much flexibility. It was also problematic in joining, and I reverted to the use of rubber to assist in connections and to aid movement within the pieces. The outcome was that malleability was revealed as a key material quality preference, not only to aid the construction of pieces, but also to enhance physical and conceptual connections to the body as a flexible entity.
Case Study 2: Mesh

RATIONALE FOR MATERIAL SELECTION
Mesh was selected due to its flexibility and availability in black. Variations of thickness were investigated, including flywire, tulle and non-slip mats. The criss-cross pattern reminded me of fishnet stockings, suggesting the potential to connect to a seductive narrative. This pattern also created the moray effect that the fan frames achieved. However, as the scale of the wire net and holes were so small, layering or folding was not necessary to create the effect, it was easily visible via slight angling of the material.

MATERIAL EXPERIMENTS
The fabric-like quality of the mesh was utilised to produce a type of garment. The intent was to expand in scale and attempt forms that were not jewellery, but still wearable, starting with a large oval shape with a slit down the centre that would symbolise a minimalist and abstracted vagina. A small-scale prototype of this piece was constructed from a white non-slip matt with a black zip, as a way of testing the form and the use of a zipper around the neck (Fig. 20).

The piece was then redesigned on a larger scale, more like a poncho than a neckpiece, and translated into black tulle. A red zipper was chosen to introduce a seductive narrative (red being a potent symbol for sexual provocation) and also facilitated interaction and variation—the piece could be unzipped in varying amounts to allow more or less of the body to be viewed.
through the opening. The tulle mesh was thin enough to also view the body through the transparent sections, or if overlapping could hide sections of the flesh from view. I photographed these interactions using myself as a model and experimented with the notion of revealing and concealing with the material and flesh in various compositions (Fig. 21).

Fig. 21: Studio research: Body Object Series 2: Mesh, 2012.

REFLECTION
The resulting images were not as provocative as anticipated, but instead resembled a nude tangled in a net. The shape of the piece was lost once worn on the body and the reference to female genitalia was indiscernible. Again, the composition referenced fashion photography (although this was starting to shift into slightly more absurd territory), but the naked female body was continuing to overpower the image. The piece was then hung against a wall in my studio for storage using two wire hooks. Surprisingly, this highlighted the material qualities of the mesh, and a bodily presence was revealed in the simplicity of the piece as a hanging sculpture isolated from the physical body (Fig. 22).
The large oval with the red slit down the centre made sense as a hanging object, while it had not done so on the body. The bodily reference (through mimicry rather than supplementation) began to construct a conversation with the material signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality, and at the same time, began to address my aim to expand representations of sexual/ised female subjectivity through artistic outcomes. This creative outcome is one that will be revisited and discussed in more detail in the final chapter, and presented in the final exhibition.
Case Study 3: Lipstick

RATIONALE FOR MATERIAL SELECTION
Lipstick was chosen as a material because it could be directly applied to the surface of the skin. It was also appealing as a material that related directly to the gendered body—lipstick is generally associated with representations of stereotypical female sexuality. Within popular culture, lipstick is often used to amplify the narrative of seduction and draw attention to the erotic nature of the mouth. I posited that lipstick could be applied in unusual ways and maintain its signification of desire.

MATERIAL EXPERIMENTS
Instead of creating a garment or wearable item, for this case study lipstick was applied directly onto the skin via the lips. Essentially my lips were used as a stamp to kiss the lipstick onto the body attempting to replicate or replace accessories, such as underwear, gloves or ties. Although my own body would be used in the case studies, I imagined this intimate technique would enhance a sexual narrative if applied on a model. Preliminary tests were conducted upon my own body in the shape of a glove (as this was an area I could reach physically).

Red lipstick was chosen as a commonly worn lipstick colour often associated with seduction. Evenly spaced kiss marks were applied to the hand and wrist, attempting to capture the impression of a glove. In another attempt, the marks were overlapped, however both variations inadvertently referenced a skin rash, not something typically considered seductive (Fig. 23).
Black lipstick was then trialled to construct a connection with black lace evening gloves, although a similarly unsatisfactory effect resulted. These images had a kind of gothic appeal and an overtly sexual connotation, which was not the intention of the case studies (Fig. 24).

**Fig. 24**: Studio research: black lipstick experiments on the body, 2011.

**REFLECTION**

The creative prototypes being produced with lipstick (both red and black) were considered unsuccessful in terms of referencing clothing items, and the images too clichéd. Lipstick, as an already highly suggestive material, was proving to be overtly erotic, especially when combined with the naked female form and stylised photographic framing. In particular, the images with the black lipstick were edging towards a SuicideGirls²⁸ aesthetic, a style of soft porn that the project was attempting to avoid.

²⁸ SuicideGirls is the soft porn website discussed in Chapter 1.
Case Study 4: Crepe Paper

RATIONALE FOR MATERIAL SELECTION
As a material crepe paper is highly malleable, but also reasonably fragile. Its textured soft surface is reminiscent of skin with its gentle wrinkles. This invites a certain sensitivity of touch. I was inspired by these skin-like qualities, and eager to see how this thin material could be manipulated and transformed.

MATERIAL EXPERIMENTS
Wanting to engage with the playful materiality of the crepe paper, the first test produced was a series of short videos where I unwound reels of the material in my hands, focusing on capturing the sounds and movement. The sound of it rubbing against itself was captivating, but the visual effect was less so (Fig. 25).

Through a process of subtle manipulation, I found I could gently push the centre of the reel to produce a small protrusion that referenced the shape of a nipple (Fig. 26). Experimentation with various degrees of protrusion in a series of reels created a miniature landscape of black nipples (Fig. 26).
Fig. 26: Studio research: crepe paper experiments with protrusion, 2011.

REFLECTION
While the initial video and sound experiments demonstrated the evocative nature of the material, I acknowledged this was not appropriately related to the sexual/ised female body. However, potential was identified in the subtle manipulation of the tight reels that produced a nipple shape. This simple technique transformed the material from banal object to an object that simultaneously operated to suggest the sexual/ised body. At this stage of testing, the pieces were not resolved into an installation, however along with the flywire, crepe paper was a material returned to later in the PhD project, discussed in Chapter Six.

Material Reflections
These case studies were designed to establish a focus on materials at the beginning of the project, and to test the ability of these materials to suggest desire. They explored the manner in which materials and the body could work together to enhance the representation of a sexual/ised narrative, by employing and re-constructing codes of desire. A key consideration was to investigate the role of materials in the perception of a sexual/ised body.

The material case studies examined the potential of various materials (including established signifiers of desire, such as lipstick, as well as banal
materials such as crepe paper) to visually signify desire. I discovered that, theoretically, any material could become sexually suggestive if manipulated into particular interactions with a body that is framed as sexually provocative. As discussed in Chapter One, the role of the woman as object for looking at is constructed through a complex system of visual signifiers, including her clothing, make up, pose and the way she is framed within the screen (or the mise en scène). Therefore, any material or object situated within the frame of desire can potentially be perceived as desirable (this is utilised in advertising by placing “beautiful” women with unrelated products to enhance their appeal).

During the case studies the female body was consistently represented as naked, the flesh itself acting to amplify desire. When reflecting on the photographic elements of the case studies, I realised the naked female body was overwhelming the visual space, forcing an overtly sexual narrative. In addition, I identified that the outcomes were relying on stereotypical stylised framing that emphasised the sexual reading of the body, regardless of the materials being tested. My cropping of images and considered compositions appeared to be largely influenced by magazine aesthetic, relating to my use of Lacan’s mirror theory discussed in Chapter One, where magazine pages substitute the mirror, reflecting to women a more complete and glamorous version of themselves. In all but the crepe paper study, it is easy to identify this consistent (though somewhat naive) framing of my own female body in this sexualised visual format (see Fig. 27).
Fig. 27: Comparison of similar visual framing within three of the case studies (fan frames, mesh and lipstick).

Through reflection and analysis of the four case studies, I realised I had unconsciously evoked my own internalised male gaze to frame the female body in especially provocative poses. This is a poignant example of how the male gaze has infiltrated Western popular culture to such an extent that it is now a cultural gaze. To allow for expanded representations of female sexual/ised subjectivity to occur in the following projects I would have to break existing visual habits, which had relied heavily on the lens of the gaze. As I had anticipated, the results of the case studies allowed me not only to reflect on the works created, but also to assess my working methods prior to commencing the three major projects (discussed in the following three chapters).

An embodied making process was essential, where materials and my body could work together to produce new creative outcomes. For this process to occur, malleable materials would be the most effective, as I noted the difficulty of working with the rigid plastic fan frames. I was able to respond with more ease to the flexibility of malleable materials, perhaps due to their similarities with the body itself. Materials with flexibility also allowed me to work by hand in an intuitive manner.
It was within this embodied process of making that I began to locate myself in the project through an awareness of my body and its collaborations with materials. Ironically I had not noticed my bodily presence in the images, where I saw myself as a somatic body only—an object that I could manipulate through tacit knowledge to create stylised compositions. I relate to the way curator Victoria Lynn describes the role of body within the work of Australian artist Julie Rrap:

The artist does not proceed from a desire to express the self. Rather she uses her performing body as a tool (Lynn 2007).

While I resonate with this sentiment and see the role of my body as a functional one rather than an expressive one, I would describe my investigations as accessing my body more like a material than a tool. In this way, my philosophy on how I view working with my own body is perhaps more closely aligned with that of American artist Carolee Schneemann, who described “the image values of flesh as material I choose to work with” (Schneemann cited in Wentrack 2014, p. 153). Scheemann used her own body in works such as *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1963), where she constructed photographic compositions that included her body along with other more traditional sculptural and painterly materials such as canvas, frames and other objects within a studio environment. I too felt that my body was an integral part of the compositions created during this stage of the project.

While the PhD project focuses on expanding representations of sexual/ised female subjectivity, it aims to do so with subtlety and sophistication, locating and existing on the boundary of erotic suggestion. In the following projects, I take into account the power of the female body as a material within artworks and attempt to balance it to create less overtly sexual/ised imagery, instead investigating ways to expand representations of sexual/ised subjectivity through the transformation of material signifiers of desire.
Chapter 4
LIQUID BODIES (Project 1)

This chapter focuses on the creative journey of Liquid Bodies, the first of three major projects documented within this dissertation. This first project could also be viewed as a type of extended case study of hot glue, as it involved a lengthy test period prior to commencing the final works for exhibition. The making process itself is documented in detail as many of the methods are new or uncommon techniques within art practice and therefore contribute to material knowledge.

Within this chapter the role of affordance is examined, citing definitions by James Gibson and Donald Norman, before expanding on my own understanding of the term, and its extended application within my project. It discusses the focus of this project on interactions between bodies and materials, and provides examples of artists in various fields in order to contextualise my works amongst an expanded community of practice.

In addition to the production of a large volume of material prototypes, this project included three photo shoots investigating the body and hand fabricated wearable sculptures. These shoots enabled me to examine the role of gendered bodies within the photographic frame, as well as explore a range of material and bodily interactions. The first of these shoots is presented in the form of a photo essay, focusing on my investigations into interactions between the body and sculptural objects. This format was chosen as a way of documenting some of the thinking-through-making that occurs within the image frame. This is followed by discussion and documentation of the second photo shoot, which introduced the male body alongside my own, and a third shoot which refined the project ready for exhibition. A reflective summation concludes the chapter revealing the surprising results of the project.

Following the overtly sexual and gendered narrative visible in the case studies, Liquid Bodies aimed for less stereotypical gender representation, and
sought new and alternative ways to suggest the body and female sexual/ised subjectivity. *Liquid Bodies* successfully shifted the tone from overtly sexualised imagery towards more chaste outcomes. I reflect on what caused the dramatic shift and articulate where I now understand the boundary of erotic suggestion to be, citing the clothed body, ambiguity of material signifiers, framing, and composition.

*Liquid bodies* attempts to locate some of the slippages between the sexual/ised body and materials, ultimately looking for the very boundaries of such possibilities. Where are the edges of the perceived sexual/ised body in relation to materials? How subtle can representation of the sexual/ised body be while maintaining recognition as a signifier of desire?

**Material Experiments: Hot Glue**

Hot glue is typically used to bond two elements together for craft projects or ‘do-it-yourself’ (DIY) activities. Within this project hot glue was selected due to its construction potential as it can be in used in isolation as a material for building volume and form. It has the unusual characteristic of being liquefied when heated, and solid yet flexible once cooled. I had a hunch that it could be used to create a new raw material that would act as a malleable but thick fabric. Conceptually hot glue had the potential to signify a sexual narrative as a seductive glossy and fluid material, evocative of the visceral body. Listing the material’s characteristics revealed many connections to the sexualised female body (see Table 1). This narrative could be further enhanced by aesthetic design choices, such as using the material to recreate body parts, or imply bodily relationships.
Table 1: Hot glue descriptive list, 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOT GLUE</th>
<th>LIST OF QUALITIES AND POSSIBLE ASSOCIATIONS IDENTIFIED IN HOT GLUE (PERCEIVED SIGNIFIERS)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visceral</td>
<td>Hot</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liquid</td>
<td>Heat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fluid</td>
<td>Warm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wet</td>
<td>Melt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glossy</td>
<td>Melting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shiny</td>
<td>Drying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seductive</td>
<td>Cooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td>Pockets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparent</td>
<td>Bubbles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translucent</td>
<td>Fascinating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodily</td>
<td>Alluring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flowing</td>
<td>Compelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pouring</td>
<td>Mesmerising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malleable</td>
<td>Polished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Sleek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorative</td>
<td>Attractive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Technical experiments were carried out to discover the limitations of the material (hot glue) and the technology (the glue gun), and to gain a sense of the boundaries of its practical use. How thin could it be applied before breaking? What variations in application are possible? How does variation in temperature affect the visual outcomes and structural integrity?

To isolate the glue as a material, baking paper was discovered as the ideal surface to pour onto, as once cooled the solid glue material could be easily peeled off, leaving only a slight surface variation where the underside became imprinted with the texture of the baking paper, creating a matt surface, while the top of the glue (exposed to the air) dried with a glossy, polished appearance.
A series of fabric type swatches were produced that explored the materials malleability by varying the pattern and density in which it was applied (Fig. 28). Thicker areas became more solid, while application that resembled netting or lace enabled more flexibility and potential for three-dimensional construction. Lace-like patterns were also sought for their connection to the stereotypical signification of female sexuality, and for its potential to both reveal and conceal a body beneath.

As well as discovering the ideal application of pattern, it was revealed that the glue was highly sensitive to adjustments in temperature. Low temperatures formed thick lines of glue that were slow to produce, while high heat produced a considerably thinner, runnier substance—a fast pouring material that was
almost pure liquid. Subtle heat adjustments could significantly change the quality of the line produced, allowing for increased or decreased control. For general use in this project a medium temperature was selected to allow a balance between control and line quality.

At lower temperatures it was possible to create a join similar to a spot weld used in metal practices, where a spot of the same material joins two existing sections. This technique was impossible at high temperatures, as the ‘spot’ would re-melt the sections it was attempting to join, liquefying any pre-constructed form. However, at lower temperatures joins could be made over a piece of baking paper, or in mid-air to aid construction of 3D forms.

In an attempt to increase the bodily narrative, experiments in 3D form began with arrangements inspired by prosthetics. Long sculptures were constructed that referenced prosthetic limbs in various lengths, as well as a prototype of a head (Fig. 30).

Fig. 30: Tassia Joannides, Material Bodies, 2013, hot glue, steel wire, dimensions variable. Photo: Matthew Stanton.
These pieces were influenced by an amalgamation of imagery of prosthetics and fetish in popular culture. Pop star Viktoria Modesta and athlete, actress and model Aimee Mullins both wear specialised prosthetics with heels or points that connote a sexualised narrative, while John Willie’s drawings of bound or disabled bodies in his *Bizarre* magazines, and photography of long leg-like boots (Fig. 31) have all been considered in an attempt to portray abstract aspects of the fetishised body. In addition to these characteristics, other bodily connotations were produced through the cell-like structures of the construction, made from repeated circular shapes, emphasising a bodily narrative of molecules and organisms.

**Fig. 31**: Inspiration for sculpture tests. From left to right: Viktoria Modesta; Aimee Mullins in Matthew Barney’s *Cremaster 3*; drawing by John Willie and photograph published in *John Willie’s Best of Bizarre*, Taschen, 2001.

**Material and Bodily Affordance**

In the production of these experimental objects, I was mindful of providing opportunities for the physical body to interact with the works. This was achieved by incorporating *affordances* for the body, such as spaces for the body to be inserted (for example a hole for an arm or leg) and by working in a scale relative to the human form, allowing for holding. I first came across the

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29 *Bizarre* was a fetish magazine produced during the 1940s and 1950s, produced by John Alexander Scott Coutts, better known under his publishing name of John Willie. See Kroll, E 2001, *John Willie’s Best of Bizarre*, Taschen, San Francisco.
notion of affordances during a 2011 Master Class at RMIT\(^\text{30}\) with French contemporary jeweller and writer Benjamin Lignel, where participants were asked to observe everyday objects and note their affordances to the hand (such as objects that can be pushed, pulled, held, lifted, opened, etc.). Psychologist James Gibson defined the term affordance in relation to the possibilities of interaction between objects and people (or animals):

> Special forms of layout afford shelter and concealment. Fires afford being warmed and being burned. Detached objects, tools, utensils, weapons, afford special types of behaviour to primates and men (1977, p. 76).

Gibson argued that the type of affordance is dependent on the capabilities of the person (for example a chair would not afford the same use for an adult and for a baby), yet the affordances exist whether they are perceived or not (a chair that affords sitting does so whether one sits on it or not). This differs to the definition provided by cognitive scientist Donald Norman in his popular book *The Design of Everyday Things* (1988), where Norman’s focus is on the design communication of objects—how well they “suggest” their potential interaction. He posits that affordances are the “fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used” as they “provide strong clues for the operations of things” (Norman 1988, p. 9). For example “Knobs are for turning. Slots are for inserting things into. Balls are for throwing or bouncing” (Norman 1988, p. 9). Norman’s affordance is practically applied as good design, while Gibson includes all possible affordances; however, both focus on functional or useful affordance, for example Norman would describe the affordance of a mug with a handle as being ideal for holding via the placement of one’s fingers through the handle, which is the perfect scale for such an interaction. Gibson would consider the affordance of the mug as an object that can also be carried, thrown, held, etc. My own interpretation of affordance includes interactions that might be considered un-functional, for

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\(^\text{30}\) Benjamin Lignel’s master class, *I ___ workshops! (or: the thrills and pangs of participation)* occurred at RMIT University in Melbourne, Victoria between 29 August – 2 September 2011, for which I was both a participant and technical assistant.
example I see the mug as also affording to be held between the knees, or nestled into the base of the spine.

In considering what I term bodily affordances, I look for all possible interactions with the body, not just those that perform functional use. I have therefore investigated ambiguous affordance by exploring potential (yet sometimes absurd) interactions with the body. These strange interactions are employed as a strategy for assisting to expand stereotypical representations of the body, and as a way of inviting the audience to imagine their own possible interactions with sculptural objects. For example, one of the long hanging pieces is constructed from many circles, each around the size of a large bangle. This provides affordance for the hand and arm to be inserted in multiple ways, or even between multiple bodies.

In addition to ambiguous bodily affordances, my project also considers material affordances—the specific material qualities that enable (or constrict) particular construction methods. Specific material affordances are often revealed after working long hours with a material until a tacit understanding of its characteristics is achieved. In this way, I sometimes feel guided by material affordances when making. However, while such material affordances can be influential during the making process, it is important to note that this project has not been motivated by concepts from New Materialisms, where emphasis is given to materials driving or participating in the making process to the point where they are considered to have agency. The focus here is instead on the agency of the maker’s body—my body—when working in close proximity with materials, and in my perception of the material affordances being revealed. It is through an embodied making process that I form an understanding of these qualities, and am able to translate my findings into artworks. It is an intimate process of looking, learning and feeling.

31 In 2013 I presented my work at the conference New Materialisms IV: Movement, Aesthetics, Ontology, University of Turku, Finland, 16–17 May. Although I found the conference engaging, I did not see strong enough connections for it to become central to my research and so it has therefore been deemed inappropriate as a framework for this thesis. A copy of my abstract is provided in the Visual Documentation of Research Activities at the end of this document.
Bodily and material affordances are a key consideration to this PhD project, as my awareness of them enables me to work sensitively and more intimately with bodily themes and respond to material characteristics. I observe these affordances in other creative works, such as in the curious body adornments created by Japanese artist Yuka Oyama in her series *Schmuck Quickies* (2003) meaning “quick jewellery”. Within a two-hour performance Oyama spontaneously creates customised jewellery for around 20 volunteers with materials that are sourced locally (Young 2008). Oyama includes her participants in the creative process by asking them what kind of jewellery they want, enabling her to construct works that extend the personalities of her participants, as well as their bodies. The photographic documentation is visually framed in a portraiture format, generating revealing studies of identity (Fig. 32). Oyama has exposed relatively unusual bodily affordances, demonstrating bizarre, but comfortable interactions between bodies and objects.

![Fig. 32: Yuka Oyama, Schmuck Quickies, 2004. Daikanyama, Japan. Photo: Becky Yee. Courtesy of the artist.](image)

Working on the edge of the fashion and design field, creative duo Lucy McRae and Bart Hess produce and document innovative body modifications that utilise common materials (such as stockings, balloons and grass). Experimenting on their own bodies, the works reveal strange material and bodily affordances, where the two ultimately work together to produce surprising interactions. Yet there’s also something seductive and sensual at play in these experiments with the surface of skin, perhaps a consequence of
the visual comparisons being presented between materials and flesh (Fig. 33).32

![Fig. 33: Lucyandbart (collaboration between Lucy McRae and Bart Hess), from left to right: Evolution, 2008; Exploded View part one, 2008; Germination Day Eight, 2008. Courtesy of the artists.](image)

Similarly skirting sexual narratives are the works of artists Rebecca Horn and Hannah Raisin. Horn’s works explore relationships between the body and its environment, such as in *Arm Extension* (1968) where two padded red arm extensions attach to the body via wide red strapping that goes from the chest down to the feet, rendering the wearer unable to move (Fig. 34). While many of Horn’s works incorporate bandage like binding that is related to her time in hospitals and sanatoriums as a young person (Celant et al.1993), they also visually reference elements of fetish and bondage. There is a sense of sexuality evident in Horn’s works, but the peculiar is also present, enabling the works to stimulate curiosity. These sexual and performative elements are further embodied in her work *Cornucopia, Séance for Two Breasts* (1970), where two upside down horn’s are strapped to the mouth with the wider ends sitting on the breasts (Fig. 34). Again straps are employed as mechanisms for attaching to the body, but also suggest a sexual narrative, particularly where the straps hold the piece against the mouth and sit across the face reminiscent of fetish masks. Yet *Cornucopia, Séance for Two Breasts* is more nurturing in its nature, as the wearer ‘s breath gently travels down the soft

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32 For more examples of works by Lucy McRae and Bart Hess see: <www.lucymcrae.net> and <barthess.nl>.
material horns to their own breasts. Both of these wearable works by Horn address a sense of looking into oneself, a solitary encounter of one’s own body via material apparatuses.

Fig. 34: Rebecca Horn: (left) Arm Extension, 1968; (right) Cornucopia, Seance for Two Breasts, 1970. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 35: Hannah Raisin, Tadpole Swamp, 2011, digital print. Courtesy of the artist.

Melbourne artist Hannah Raisin also creates interactions between materials and her own female body through performative works. In a photographic series exhibited at Blindside Gallery in 2011, Raisin employed her naked or partially clothed body in photography and video works that explore self-speculation, beauty, gender and sexuality (Raisin 2011). In Raisin’s words, the works:

…it examine and reflect contemporary Western societies relationship to domesticities or wildness in imagining how we might transgress restrictive identity norms and stereotypes embedded in our socio-cultural environment (Raisin 2011).

Raisin achieves this by subverting representations of identity norms through her use of unusual or absurd narratives. For example, in one photographic image we see Raisin dressed in a black sequined bathing suit and cap, perhaps suggesting costume or even fetish, however Raisin alters the mood of the image by posing face down in a muddy pond, adding a bizarre and

33 These works by Hannah Raisin were exhibited in the exhibition Separation Anxiety, curated by Claire Anna Watson at Blindside Gallery in Melbourne, VIC in November to December 2011.
abject\textsuperscript{34} narrative to her work (Fig. 35). This unusual imagery complicates a singular reading of the work, showing that the body can be multiple things at once. It also demonstrates the crucial role of materials that accompany the body in providing visual clues regarding identity.

In each of the works discussed we see the body engaged with materials in ways that expand our understandings of bodily form and/or identity. In Oyama’s \textit{Schmuck Quickies}, unusual material interventions with the body act to enhance the identity of the participant, while presenting new interactions between materials and the body. Lucy McRae and Bart Hess’ body extensions draw attention to the surface of the skin, simulating new and unusual skin textures and providing new ways of imagining the body. Through Horn’s works we see the body strapped and confined by materials, in gestures that appear both restrictive and expansive. Similarly, Hannah Raisin’s work reminds us that sexuality and identity can be complicated by material signifiers, and even made absurd. Each utilise material and bodily affordances in the construction of their performative gestures. Such gestures are able to emphasise the physicality of the body, drawing attention to the body as a material itself. Often the materials act as signifiers of desire, such as Raisin’s shiny black sequined bathing suit.

\textit{Liquid Bodies} differs from the works of these artists as I place focus on the spontaneous interactions between the body and the sculptures, incorporating bodily spaces that would “provide strong clues for the operations of things” (Norman 1988, p. 9) as Norman suggested affordances to do. I designed the sculptures hoping they would seduce me into touching them and applying them to my body, and that once activated by interaction, the pieces might engage subtle notions of desire.

\textsuperscript{34} The term abject is here used in the context of the abject as critically outlined by Julia Kristeva in her book \textit{Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection} (1982) as “that which disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva 1982, p. 4). Kristeva’s conception of the abject disturbs us as it includes all things that remind us of the limits of our bodies. Throughout the dissertation wherever this term is used it is within this context, specifically in relation to art practice. Other artists whose work explores abjection include Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin, Louise Bourgeois and Patricia Piccinini—each if these artists and examples of their works are discussed later in the dissertation.
I anticipated that once there was a body physically inserted into the works that a narrative of ambiguous sexual/ised female subjectivity would emerge. This was tested in the first photo shoot where a series of images were self-shot in my studio. These images were not intended to be finished works; rather they were part of the thinking and making process. Photography is often used within my methodology to ‘freeze’ the creative process in mid-thought so that I can reflect on it later, and working alone allowed me to work quickly and intuitively. Through this process, I was able to better understand the way affordances were working (or not) within the sculptures, and also to further reflect on the role of the female body within the frame.

The following Photo Essay gathers a selection of images from the first shoot that capture the essence of the investigation between the body and a series of wearable sculptures.
Photo Shoot 1: Photo Essay
Photo Shoot 2: Softening Gendered Representations

The first photo shoot had been an opportunity to work quickly and spontaneously to capture initial ideas within the image frame, however the second shoot enabled a different way of working. To refine the image quality, a professional photographer was employed to take shots under my direction (see examples in Fig. 36 and 37). I also engaged a male participant to be photographed, along with my own body, and learnt how to both direct and speed up my working process. I prepared a storyboard of the compositions and worked with the photographer to capture these specific arrangements. Some were tightly cropped, some portraiture style, and others focussed on demonstrating the bodily affordances of the sculptures, such as how they could be worn, or used to join two bodies together (Fig. 38).

Fig. 36: Studio research: studio test shot, 2012. Photograph by the artist.

Fig. 37: Professional documentation, 2012. Photograph by Matthew Stanton.

As a response to the overtly gendered sexuality demonstrated in the case studies, the male body was introduced to pursue less stereotypically gendered and sexualised imagery. Male and female bodies were both investigated in an attempt to identify a gender-neutral zone, rather than one that was specifically feminine. With so much focus on the female form in the case studies, I wondered what would happen if the male and female body were treated equally within artworks? I hoped that by including male and

35 For ethical reasons, identifiable features had to be cropped from images of my male participant in this shoot.
female bodies it might expand the reading of the works themselves, outside of sex and gender stereotypes.

**Fig. 38:** Tassia Joannides, *Material Bodies*, 2013. Digital images of hot glue sculptures on the body. Photo: Matthew Stanton.

While the images successfully removed the overtly gendered content, they lacked representation of sexualised subjectivity. The clothed bodies began to act more like mannequins, almost desexualised and static, particularly images cropped to edit out the individualism of the face. The stillness within the images was amplified by my control of the shots; each frame had been planned as a still image. In the first shoot, I had been able to capture dynamic images of my body encountering the sculptures for the first time, but in the second shoot images had begun to default to the magazine style aesthetic identified in the case studies. A third shoot would be necessary to address the framing issue; this would be done by attempting to increase a narrative of the absurd, in a similar way to Hannah Raisin’s use of the absurd in her photographic works (discussed in the first half of this chapter). However, unlike Raisin, my intent was to use only a hint of the bizarre and to balance this with a type of elegance. The intention was to create works that operate on the edge of desire, where there is some signal of desire, but this signal is not clear. I am inspired by a quote from art historian Ernst Gombrich who said “delight lies somewhere between boredom and confusion” (Gombrich 1979, p. 9). It is this in-between state that I aim to situate my works.
The second issue that needed to be addressed in the final shoot was that while the works had been successful at neutralising the gendered representation, the sexual content had decreased too. I had been investigating the potential of hot glue to act as a signifier of desire and I believed it was capable of doing this. But I needed to consider the larger picture, the framing, the bodies, the poses, and crucially the sculptural forms themselves. Therefore, I returned to the abstracted vulva shape explored in the case studies with mesh. The mesh piece was a minimalist interpretation of female genitals, essentially an oval with a slit down the centre. As I sought to inject more explicit representation into this piece, a decorative vulva was designed utilising the visceral qualities of the hot glue to amplify the suggestion of the body. This provided an opportunity to refine the lacework pattern that had been developing, which also reflected the layers and folds of a vulva, a form employed by many female artists of the 1960s and 1970s. A pivotal feminist work from that era is Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* (1974–79), which consisted of 39 place settings at a triangular shaped table, each setting featuring a hand-crafted vulva form (Fig. 39).

![Image removed due to copyright restrictions](Image removed due to copyright restrictions)

![Image removed due to copyright restrictions](Image removed due to copyright restrictions)

Fig. 39: Judy Chicago. *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79, mixed media including ceramic, porcelain and textile, 1463 x 1463 cm.

This work is still highly relevant today as it depicts a range of abstracted vulvas, bringing attention to the multiple folds of women’s genitals, a body area regularly censored within visual media. The Australian Classification Board states that women’s genitals must be “healed to a single crease” (Gleeson 2016; Drysdale 2010) to meet guideline classifications. Therefore, only one type of female genitals is ever depicted, and many researchers are starting to find connections between this censorship and an increase in
labiaplasty.\textsuperscript{36} While my work often uses abstracted bodily forms, I see depictions of the vulva as key to expanding representations of female sexual/ised subjectivity. The final design therefore included an amalgamation of oval and teardrop shapes referencing vaginal openings, and a fluid quality of line that aimed to capture visceral bodily qualities. Holes were incorporated as affordances for the body, to encourage interaction via the insertion of hands, arms, fingers, legs, feet, heads, or indeed the whole body, or even multiple bodies. These holes were an invitation to play and to interact with the material, and explore the many ways it could collaborate with the body. To accommodate the body, the scale of the final piece was increased to a height relative to an average body height. The increase in scale required some alterations to construction methods, including the creation of a paper template, which could then be broken up into smaller panels that could be constructed and then joined together (Fig. 40).

\textbf{Fig. 40:} Works in progress: large hot glue piece and paper template, 2012.

American artist Hannah Wilke repeatedly worked with the form of the vulva in works such as \textit{S.O.S. Starification Object Series} (1974) a performance-based photographic work, where Wilke’s mostly naked body is covered with pieces of chewing gum, which she sculpted into representations of female genitalia. These provocative tiny sculptures express a confident female sexuality, while stylistically the images play on the magazine style aesthetic I was attempting to move away from.

\textsuperscript{36} Labiaplasty is cosmetic surgery to alter the appearance of the labia.
Wilke subverts the stereotypical presentation of the female body by disrupting it with her wearable sculptures. Here, too, an element of the absurd destabilises a traditional reading of these poses and evokes curiosity. *Liquid Bodies* also utilises wearable sculptures to question the way the body is viewed, although it uses strategies and outcomes quite different to Wilke’s. In *Liquid Bodies*, the vulva is not simply placed onto the body, but invites interaction. The strategy of incorporating bodily affordance is applied to entice the participant to place themself inside the piece.

The final piece was constructed as a long oval 2D form, but due to the flexibility and scale, it could move into variations of form as a sculpture or a type of garment. The malleability also meant it could be installed to create volume and three dimension coming out from the wall (Fig. 42).
Photo Shoot 3: The Boundary of Erotic Suggestion

The final photo shoot was conducted with two male and two female bodies, (including my own body within this arrangement). In addition to showing both male and female bodies, different ethnicities are also represented (Korean, Australian and Kurdish) however identifiable features are minimised in the final images, and therefore variations of skin tone are not obvious.  

![Photo Shoot 3: The Boundary of Erotic Suggestion](image)

Fig. 44: Work in progress: images of the photography studio I worked in demonstrating the type of lighting and set up used, 2012.

The shoot took place in a closed studio where I worked individually with each participant. They were given instructions to interact with the piece however they felt comfortable, and to look for different ways to engage with it. By allowing for them to respond spontaneously I hoped to capture more idiosyncratic and curious poses. The result was an intimate process working with each participant, capturing the moments where bodies and objects met in unexpected ways (Fig. 45). I produced a large volume of raw images, and some were selected for minimal postproduction cropping and editing in Photoshop.

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NOTES

37 I obtained ethics approval to allow me to investigate the use of bodies in artworks in an ethical manner.
Four final images were selected to accompany the sculpture in exhibition, one of each participant (see Fig. 46). The images were chosen to demonstrate the interactions possible with the piece, as well as highlight the flexibility and movement of the material. This was most successfully captured in an image of one participant jumping into the air. The sculpture and the body are captured together in mid-air, emphasising the fluid movement and unison of body and sculpture.
Fig. 46: Tassia Joannides, *Liquid Bodies*, 2013, digital prints, largest approx. 25x27 cm.
The final installation consisted of the four printed images alongside the actual sculpture. Within the gallery space, the hot glue piece was pinned to the wall at various points allowing folds to occur. This had the added effect of creating multiple shadows on the wall behind, emphasising the malleable qualities of the glossy material. To the right-hand-side of the piece, the four images were fixed to the wall in a scattered arrangement at roughly eye level. The images were included to give the audience clues about potential interactions between body and work.

This final outcome of the Liquid Bodies project was exhibited in the group show Close to Hand II at First Site gallery in Melbourne (VIC), 7 August to 16 August 2013. The exhibition showcased works from RMIT Object based Practice student union group MAKE, a collective of researchers working with object and body-based works.

Fig. 47: Tassia Joannides, Liquid Bodies, 2013, Installation shot from First Site Gallery.
Reflections on *Liquid Bodies*

*Liquid Bodies* aimed to move away from the stereotypical clichés of female sexual/ised subjectivity, such as those in the case studies, and to test other ways of suggesting the body in artworks. This was approached by clothing the body and by introducing a mix of male and female participants. The body was alluded to via the use of bodily affordance, a strategy of enticing the viewer to imagine their own body interacting with sculptures, rather than framing a sexual/ised female body beside it. During the first and second photo shoots, representation of sexual/ised female subjectivity was almost absent and so the final sculpture was designed as a large abstract vulva to inject sexual and bodily presence. Essentially, I was searching for the fine line between allure and the banal.

Importantly I felt I had discovered the edges of the project. The case studies had uncovered overt sexual and gendered content, while *Liquid Bodies* was subtler, losing explicit connections to sex and gender representation. In the catalogue essay for the exhibition, Melbourne-based artist and writer Tamsin Green observed of my works:

> I am drawn to the bodily adornments that mimic the bodies’ own production. These are transmuted and obfuscated lacelike traces to be bent at will. To obfuscate is also to becloud. A nice metaphor in this case: To be embellished by a cloud. But these clouds also carry in them a gendered performance that can be manipulated much like the material itself. So perhaps one transformation these works produce is a softening of those boy/girl boundaries received at birth. Suggesting a specific playfulness within this patterning (Green 2013, p. 2).

Green rightly points to the “softening” of gender boundaries that the works achieve, however my own conclusion is that the works have softened this content so much that it leaves the viewer with little clue to the intent of the work. I concluded that this was down to the use of clothing, the introduction of
male bodies and the way these elements confused the recognition of signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality.

While the case studies displayed large amounts of flesh, visible skin is minimised in the *Liquid Bodies* project. This was a mostly aesthetic decision due to the pale colour of the glue—by covering the body with black clothing, the glue stood out against the dark background. At the time I didn’t realise the implication of covering up the body, that by limiting the amount of visible flesh the reading of the work was greatly shifted. While some clothing has the potential to elicit desire, it could also be used to the opposite effect. This was emphasised by the static poses that had been designed for the second shoot, unintentionally de-sexualising the body, which now acted as a mannequin.

The introduction of male bodies alongside female bodies was also intended to assist in neutralising the sexual and stereotypical gender representation of the case studies. The bodies of the four participants in the final works were generally desexualised in their plain and un-gendered clothing, mostly displaying nondescript features; all except for the jumping image, which highlights the wild hair of the female in flight. At close inspection, we might recognise that she has shorter sleeves than the other participants, hence more visible skin, and she has taken off her shoes. The shot therefore exudes a feeling of freedom and movement, while the others feel somewhat restrained and even awkward.

The result was that multiple narratives were vying for attention, and female sexual/ised subjectivity had become secondary to other narratives. Consequently, the vulva form was revisited for the final sculpture as a substitute for the body, replicating its visceral and flexible qualities.
Fig. 48: Tassia Joannides, *Liquid Bodies* (detail), 2013, hot glue. Photo: Kate Mollison.

Fig. 49: Tassia Joannides. *Liquid Bodies*, 2013, digital print, approx. 18x23cm.

This project involved many layers of ideas and strategies, but ultimately I concluded that too many variables were being tested within this one project, which ended up travelling all the way to the boundary of erotic suggestion. Where the case studies had been too overt, the more chaste outcomes of this project lacked the seductive spark I was interrogating. The next project would need to become more concentrated. Could I find a middle ground where the tension was far greater and the work becomes highly nuanced?

In the following project, I aim to increase the sexual/ised narrative within three separate works, by returning to the skin as a site for material interaction, constructing forms that more directly invite wearability, and by bringing my own female body into the gallery space in performance, so that the works respond more directly to my research proposition, and attempt to expand representations of sexual/ised female subjectivity via signifiers of desire.
In 2013 I was invited to exhibit in a curated exhibition of four female artists exploring the body across the fields of contemporary jewellery and expanded studio practice. *Embodied* brought together artists Selina Wolfe, Rachel Timmins, Suse Scholem and myself. Scholem—who also curated the exhibition—focused on the strength of the group to explore “new modes of engaging the body as subject and object” (Scholem 2014, p. 5). Her interest was in the way artists with a jewellery approach can “go beyond the traditionally wearable to incorporate performance, photography and film, interactive installation and wearable object” (Scholem 2014, p. 5). Scholem explains:

> There is a re-emergence of contemporary jewellers, both locally and internationally, whose practices combine these potentials. *Embodied* assembles four of those artists together in Melbourne to communicate variable perspectives on the body (2014, p. 5).

The curatorial brief specified each artist produce three separate but connected works each in a different medium. I chose to explore the slippages between bodies and materials that might expand representations of female subjectivity, utilising photography, performance, and wearable objects (Fig. 50–52).
In this chapter I discuss each of these works individually, before reflecting on the outcomes of the three works and their relationships within one exhibition. After identifying the boundary of sexual narrative in the previous project, these new works aimed to engage more directly with signifiers of desire, and to create finely balanced outcomes that were not as overtly sexualised as the earlier case study results.

The sexualised body is reignited in *Sticker Series*, where a performative process of adorning the flesh is documented in a series of two gendered images. My own female body is brought physically into the gallery in *Body Badges*, investigating forced interactions and perceptions of female bodies framed within the gallery space. *The Embodied Series* completes the trio of works, consisting of a series of five ambiguously wearable objects made from second-hand bras. These sculptural arrangements begin to echo the forms of the body itself, while also employing bodily affordance through the imagined encounter of wearing. Each of these projects enabled me to consider the use of material signifiers and simultaneously test different modes of presenting the body. These works are contextualised alongside a discussion of female artists from the pivotal era of the 1960s and 1970s, as well the works of current and emerging female artists, both locally and internationally.
After identifying the neutralising effect of the totally clothed body in the Liquid Bodies project, I returned to the skin as site in a diptych of gendered images. Black stickers were selected as a material that could be applied directly to the flesh, 'sticking' to its surface, rather than simply adorning it. Years earlier I had done some work with this material and saw an opportunity to customise the application of stickers with the sexualised body in mind. Aside from a seductive sheen on the surface, the material itself is imbued with few qualities that signify desire; other signifiers would need to be implied via the design, such as lace and tattoos.

Lace patterning was utilised in the previous Liquid Bodies project, as a visceral fabric with many holes allowing flesh to be seen in sections and covered in others. This strategy would be employed again, this time utilising the contrast of black on pale skin. Paola Di Trochio explains how this approach has traditionally been exploited within fashion:

Black’s control over light is particularly effective in the interplay between concealment and display. The strong delineations between dark fabric and pale flesh draw the eye to the exposed skin, framing these areas as erogenous zones (2008, p. 67).

Within this series, the neck and shoulders were identified as a body zone that can be viewed as erogenous and alluring, yet not overtly sexualised. Utilising this area enabled me to play with designs that loosely reference jewellery (such as a necklace) and therefore wearability. The design also expresses a visible connection to tattoos, evident in the application of black line directly onto skin. In Western culture tattoos have also been used to highlight particular body areas, often displayed in sexualised regions such as the breasts or above the buttocks. Tattoos are increasingly being associated with rebellious female sexuality within Western popular culture, as seen in the popularity of the SuicideGirls website (discussed in Chapter One), and also
embraced by pop culture celebrities such as Miley Cyrus and Rihanna (Fig. 53).

**Fig. 53:** Example of celebrity tattoos bringing attention to erogenous zones. (left) Rihanna; (right) Miley Cyrus.

Working from home, using my lounge room as a makeshift studio, I again chose my own body to work on, and enlisted my partner as the male participant. Working in this intimate environment allowed time to work intuitively onto familiar bodies and allow patterns to develop candidly. Many variations of design and composition were explored during this phase (see examples in Fig. 54).

**Fig. 54:** Studio research: test designs and compositions, 2013
Stickers were applied to the selected areas in clusters of repeated shapes. Growing in cellular-like structures around the neck, shoulders and top of the chest, I approached the application of stickers onto the body in a spontaneous and organic fashion, using letterset and black dot stickers. Asymmetrical letters (like R or G) were discarded, as their connection to letters and language was an unnecessary distraction, and preference was given to letters that were also effective as abstract shapes (such as O or C). Hand cutting was also utilised to alter or individualise shapes.

Following a period of testing, the final designs were applied and shot outside against a brick wall background (Fig. 55). Later the background was removed in Photoshop as the brick wall brought its own presence as a signifier, and drew attention away from the bodies. A stark black background was selected to increase attention to the pale flesh and heighten a sensual narrative. The black background also has the effect of creating drama within the tightly cropped frames; the lines of the body becoming like those of a landscape (Fig. 56–57).

![Fig. 55: Works in progress: final images showing brick wall background prior to Photoshop editing, 2013.](image)

This series successfully increased a sexual/ised narrative that was missing in the *Liquid Bodies* project, achieved by a combination of colour, framing and reference to signifiers of desire, yet also enabled alternative readings and narratives to be perceived. Both the male and female body are sexualised in their presentation of flesh, yet this proposition is not overly explicit. A subtle tension becomes visible in these works, constructed by the use of light and dark, concealment and display.
My own body, and that of my partner, had been treated equally during the creative process, attempting to position male and female bodies equally beside each other as objects of the gaze, adorned by subtle signifiers.

The placement of the stickers draws attention to particular body areas, enhanced by the titles *Collar Bone* and *Shoulder*. This has the added effect of fetishising these body areas as objects separate from the body. Fetish themes are further referenced via the connection to tattoos or lace as signifiers of desire. The pieces are suggestive, but leave the viewer to question the presence of desire, rather than enforce it.

Due to the ephemeral nature of this series, photography was the ideal medium to capture the transient interaction where stickers and the body are both utilised as materials. The images purposefully retain some of the magazine style aesthetic so familiar within my work, while the dramatic cropping and stark background reposition the bodies for the gallery space.

This project also resolved some issues with scale that had been identified from the *Liquid Bodies* project, where the photographic prints had been exhibited at a small scale. This was addressed in the *Sticker Series* by printing at a scale similar to life size (only marginally larger), and by installing at a height slightly elevated from standard viewing height.
At a similar scale to other bodies in the room, this had the effect of giving the (photographed) bodies more presence in the gallery, simultaneously drawing attention to other bodies in the space (both of the audience and other representations of bodies in artworks). This began a dialogue within the gallery that was further enhanced by my live performance *Body Badges* (discussed in the next section).

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 58:** Installation shot of *Sticker Series* at fortyfivedownstairs. Photo: Kate Mollison.

*Body Badges* (Performance)

*Body Badges* was a participatory project that encouraged audience members to engage directly with the body of the artist (my body), implicating both the bodies of artist and audience through interaction and display. In the live performance, I wore a costume of black clothing covered in badges. Printed on the badges were the names of body parts (such as navel, leg or nipple), which were positioned over the correlating parts of my body (knee over the knee etc.). Participants (the gallery audience) were invited to select and take a badge.
This work required participants to physically engage in selecting body areas, opening up opportunities for discussion about the way we think about our bodies and the bodies of others. Challenges for the participants included the forced intimate interaction with my female body, deciding which body part to select, and where to put a badge once taken. This work navigates gently around issues of gender and sexuality by drawing attention to the body as object and subject within the framework of the gallery space.

This performance piece was initially tested in the early stages of my PhD during Benjamin Lignel’s 2011 RMIT master class, which was referred to in the previous chapter for introducing the idea of affordance to my work. The test performance took place in the RMIT city campus cafeteria, interacting with the general public including students, staff and labourers on lunch breaks. I wore tight black leggings and a roller neck top reminiscent of 1970s performance artists, which acted like a blank canvas with eye catching coloured badges (Fig. 59). Cool colours were selected for erogenous zones (such as nipples or navel), and warm colours for less sexualised body areas that were more comfortably accessible (such as leg or arm). While this colour scheme worked well for the bustling cafeteria environment, some costume variations were generated for the gallery space.

Fig. 59: Test performance of Body Badges, 2011: (left) Close up of badges on neck; (right) performance test in the RMIT cafeteria.

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39 Benjamin Lignel’s master class, I ___ workshops! (or: the thrills and pangs of participation) occurred at RMIT University in Melbourne, Victoria between 29 August – 2 September 2011, for which I was both a participant and technical assistant.
The costume was revised to create connotations of elegance and allure, replacing the leggings and roller neck with formal slacks and a semi-transparent top with three quarter length sleeves (with shoe string strap singlet underneath), satin gloves and patent leather platform stilettos (all black. See Fig. 60). Each article of clothing was selected due to its potential to act as a signifier of desire, and allowed me to further investigate how items such as stilettos simultaneously function as common attire for women’s formal dress.

Fig. 60: Tassia Joannides, *Body Badges*, 2014, participatory performance at fortyfivedownstairs. Photo: Kate Mollison.

The stiletto heel has been examined by an array of artists exploring gender and representation, including Hannah Wilke wearing stilettos in her *So Help Me Hannah* series (1974-84), and Cindy Sherman in *Untitled film still 15* (1978)\(^40\). Perhaps one of the most intriguing investigations of the stilettos is

\(^40\) The use of stilettos as a signifier is even more noticeable in the world of popular culture, such as in film, where female characters are regularly dressed in stilettos or high heels even when the characters actions would be hindered by such impractical clothing—for example when they are portraying a superhero, action hero, or special agent (such as Anne Hathaway as Catwoman in *The Dark Night Rises* (2012); Kate Beckinsale in the film series *Underworld* (first film released in 2003); Charlize Theron in *Aeon Flux* (2005) among others).
that by Birgit Jürgenssen (Fig. 62), where a hand rests on a stiletto in an uncanny resemblance to the foot. Jürgenssen’s elegant black and white photography precedes a more confronting image Overstepping (2001; Fig. 61) by Julie Rrap, which shows a digitally altered female foot with flesh heels that appear to have grown from the heel—a provocative image that is simultaneously beautiful and horrifying. The image sums up the absurdity of such constricting and gender conforming attire, reminding us of the unnatural quality of wearing a high heel. Yet today heels are considered a highly normal form of body modification, an extension of the body that we take for granted in everyday life—including in the gallery space where stilettos are a common sight.

I am interested in how these potent signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality have become increasingly overlooked and under-questioned. My outfit for the performance therefore pieces together signifiers, such as the semi-transparent top, yet relies on them going seemingly unnoticed by the audience, therefore looking at how they operate in the everyday. The costume fulfilled the criteria of the performance by being closely fitted to the body, but also functioned as an ‘opening night outfit’—less performative and more able to become part of the audience. It allowed for most of the body to be covered, but some areas of flesh to be exposed. Make up was colour restricted to focus on the eyes with black liquid eyeliner and mascara, but no lip colour. This had
the effect of sexualising the body, but not to an overt point. I wanted to gently seduce my audience, not intimidate or provoke them.

Using an image of the 2011 costume, several colour palettes for the badges were generated in Photoshop (Fig. 63); however, the bright colours did not support the sophisticated look I wanted to achieve. Therefore, black was chosen with small white text, giving the costume a more refined and simplified aesthetic. Black badges were also less obvious on the costume, meaning the audience had to get closer to my body to see them clearly. A text list of body parts was prepared for printing, incorporating a range of body areas ranging from inoffensive to taboo (table 2).
Table 2: List of body areas to be printed onto badges, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of body areas to be printed onto badges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 x NECK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 x SHOULDER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 x SHOULDER BLADE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 x COLLAR BONE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 x ARM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 x ELBOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 x WRIST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 x HAND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 x FINGERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 x NIPPLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 x CHEST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 x BOOB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 x NAVAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 x BELLY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 x WAIST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 x HIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 x BACK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 x LOWER BACK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 x SPINE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 x BOTTOM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 x INNER THIGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 x KNEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 x SHIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 x CALVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 x ANKLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 x LEG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total = 131</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 65: From top to bottom: A4 sheet with text ready for cutting out; Body Badges; ‘HAND’ badge on a hand at the opening event.
The text was printed onto A4 sheets of paper, each one hand-cut to the circular shape required before being constructed into badges with a badge-making machine. The badges took many hours over several days to fabricate and the physical process was repetitive and tiring on the body. This was a very different process than previous projects, where intuition and material guidance were typically key to my methodology. Here, the hand fabrication of the badges had to be precisely planned before execution, and the costume carefully considered. The only part I would not have full control over would be once I stepped out into the audience on the opening night, where public interactions would complete the work and direct its conclusion. Due to the participatory nature of the performance, audience involvement would be crucial.

Fig. 66: Costume for Body Badges, 2014. Photos: Kate Mollison.

I noted that up until now the performative aspects of my work had always occurred and been documented privately, such as in a closed studio. Bringing my physical body into the work via live performance was a logical step within this project, especially as I had been heavily inspired early on by female performance artists of the 1960s and 1970s such as Marina Ambramovic, Yoko Ono and Carolee Schneemann. These pioneering female performance artists (amongst others) were pivotal in forging a path for female subjectivity in art and famously tested this area to quite extreme and sometimes violent ends.
In 1974 Marina Ambramovic provocatively exposed the limits of audience participation in *Rhythm 0* at Studio Morra (Naples). In the performance, Ambramovic had arranged 72 items on a table, including a feather and a knife, which audience members could use on her body. The performance tested the audience who grew increasingly violent with her body-as-object over the six-hour duration, removing her clothes and cutting her skin. While my own performance was far less threatening, this example demonstrates the potential for the audience to take things too far, and to behave in unpredictable ways. However, Ambramovic provoked this audience response when she decided to remain passive throughout the performance.

A similar result occurred in Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece* (1964) where she invited audience members to cut at her clothing with a pair of scissors. As Ono sat motionless on a stage, audience members cut at her clothing until she was left to cover her breasts with her hands so as not to expose them. While Ono and Ambramovic remained object-like during their performances giving agency to the audience, other artists during this era were utilising their female bodies in embodied and active ways. This active approach is strong in the work of Carolee Schneemann.

While utilising her body as a material within the documented performative studio installation *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1963), Schneemann’s body is both made still as it is captured in the image frame, but simultaneously active as she returns the gaze that is predictably upon her. Photographs of this work depict Schneemann with various paintbrush designs on her face and body, interacting with materials such as plastic sheets and studio furniture. The active body is key to many of her works, as highlighted by Amelia Jones:

> Schneemann recognizes that it is in part the *movement* of the sexualized body in performance that is so threatening to interpretive systems (1998, p. 150, italics in original)
This active female body is demonstrated further in works such as *Naked Action Lecture* (1968) where Schneemann gave an art history lecture while periodically undressing and re-dressing, and in her well known performance piece *Meat Joy* (1964), where interactions between four male and four female bodies mingled with each other and other materials, including meat products and paint, in an orgy-like performance. Schneemann remains active within her artworks, a strategy shared by other artists of this time including Hannah Wilke and VALIE EXPORT, both often actively forcing their gaze out onto the onlooking audience in works such as TAPP und TATKINO (EXPORT, 1968) and the SO HELP ME HANNAH SERIES (Wilke 1978–84).

In my own performance, I constructed a forced interaction between myself and audience participants who chose to remove a badge from my clothing. I combined passive and active elements, as once invited, audience members could remove a badge from my costume at their will, however the interaction was heavily controlled by me. I engaged in individual dialogue with participants, forcing them to not only engage with my physical body but also to exchange conversation and the gaze. Crucially, access to my body was through text, a representation of my body, but not my body. The badges acted like a shield, safeguarding my actual body from the audience.

In covering myself with the badges, the body was broken down into text, enabling even taboo areas to be approached with comfort. This was further facilitated by the gallery environment, which encourages people to engage in interactions they might not in other public spaces.
Artist and designer Adele Varcoe also creates spaces for bodily exchanges, via a focus on “fashion experiences” (Varcoe 2017), where participation involving the audience often encourages consideration of one’s own body and clothing. For example, in her work *Newfangled Fashion* (2011) at Craft Victoria, Varcoe provided a unique experience for participants to strut the catwalk in a private tent filled with a naked and cheering audience (Fig. 70). Having experienced the performance firsthand, I felt anxious, but also exhilarated by the surprising situation, where my clothed body was under the gaze of many naked bodies, forcing me to reflect on my clothing choice. While Varcoe’s work encourages us to question the materials that clothe us, she also uses playful humour; the work has a certain ‘tongue-in-cheek’ aspect. This ‘cheekiness’ is also injected into my own performance where the text of body parts allowed me to flirtatiously play with innuendo in dialogue with the audience.

I was inspired to attempt more brazenness within my work after being exposed to some of the confident and wild female performance artists in the early 2010s, such as the Wau Wau Sisters. Their uninhibited show *The Wau Wau Sisters are Naked As The Day They Were Born Again!* (Melbourne 2013) was emblematic of a bold new era of female performance that attempts to playfully use imagery and stereotypes from *raunch culture* (such as the self-objectified naked or fetishised female body dressed in stereotypical attire) and to use this to approach and expose issues of gendered and sexual stereotypes. This was achieved during their comedic final act where they playfully stripped two male audience members and swapped all their (gendered) clothes with them, receiving roaring applause from the audience.

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41 *Newfangled Fashion* was part of the *Material* exhibition at Craft Victoria (Melbourne, VIC) 4 August–19 August 2011. The exhibition was part of Craft Victoria’s annual event *Craft Cubed* (4 August–3 September 2011); the theme for the year was ‘Hybrid’.

42 The Wau Wau Sisters are real life stepsisters Arienne Truscott and Tanya Gagne. I was in the audience for their show *The Wau Wau Sisters are Naked As The Day They Were Born Again!* Live at the Famous Spiegeltent (Melbourne, VIC), Monday 20 February 2013.
Mixing performance art with modern burlesque, their largely nude performances contribute to the breaking down of gender stereotypes, while simultaneously reinforcing them. The performance used humour to construct a comfortable space where the difficult politics of gender stereotyping could be performed and questioned centre stage. This was possible due to their ability to toe a perfectly balanced line between sexual suggestion, provocation, charisma and play. I hoped that my performance would also have potential to toe this line.

Performing within the gallery space in front of (and interacting with) a live audience for the first time forced me to see my own female body in a different role. Suddenly I was playing the part of the provocateur, attempting to entice the audience with my textual body. This live performance was an opportunity to discover the role of my physical body within my practice, and to investigate the implications of its presence. How important was the use of my body in the creative works? How did it affect the outcomes?
The performance opened up dialogue about whose body the badges represented. Does my body become part of your body? Or does it remain my body on your body? For example, one participant said the badge they took remained associated with my body, “that is Tass’ elbow”, but when describing a badge taken by a friend, it became the friend’s body, “that is my friend’s knee”. The outcome was that many participants continued to associate the badges with the body of the other (either the artist’s body or the body of others in the space), not of the self. While personally I felt that it was my own body on all the badges, almost as if I was giving parts of my body away.

It posed a second dilemma for the participant—what to do with a badge once they had ownership of it. Should it be placed on their own body in reflection of the place it came from? Or placed on the chest where brooches/badges would traditionally belong? Interestingly, some people chose to make puns and play with body placement. For example, one young man took a ‘hand’ badge and put it on his bottom. Others made strange body combinations by placing labels in the ‘wrong’ spot, such as an ‘ankle’ on an elbow. Through the combination of textual representation and performance the body was
simultaneously reduced and amplified. The audience engaged with this tension via their participation.

![Documentation of participants wearing Body Badges at the opening. Photos: Kate Mollison.](image)

**Fig. 73:** Documentation of participants wearing Body Badges at the opening. Photos: Kate Mollison.

While the sexual/ised female body operated as the focus of the work, the lack of material transformation was identified as affecting the work’s ability to evoke mystery. Material transformation often reveals elements of the uncanny—something familiar, yet also strange. It is that moment between comfort and discomfort that I wanted to tease out further, and felt that it could be achieved through focus back on materials and their transformative qualities. While the costume and badges had been deliberately selected and constructed, they acted as a vehicle for the text and communicated as signifiers without intervention. For example, the stilettos and semi-transparent top were not interrogated or disrupted, rather they were used as they exist as signifiers of desire, while in other projects I had been able to transform material signifiers by incorporating alternative materials and playing with substitution. Here the body was physically present and the signifiers were direct and uncomplicated. In the following section, I describe how perceptions of the body are infused with multiplicity via ambiguous wearable sculptures.
Fig. 74: Tassia Joannides, *Body Badges*, 2014, participatory performance at fortyfivedownstairs. Photo: Kate Mollison.
Embodied Series (Wearable Objects)

As the third component of my contribution to the exhibition Embodied at fortyfivedownstairs I produced a series of five ambiguously wearable neckpieces constructed from second-hand bras. The works suggest the body through their anthropomorphic qualities, such as the bodily lines of the structural garments employed, and via the suggestive bodily affordances provided. This layering of reference to the body was further amplified by visual reference to fetish clothing and accessories, contributing to works that attempt a gentle seduction played out somewhere between fetish and the banal.

![Embodied Series](image)

**Fig. 75:** Tassia Joannides, Embodied series, 2014.

Connected to a history of feminism via the bra-burning era, bras were selected as a material also linked to contemporary issues of *raunch culture*. Within Western society, bras are ever more visible, yet they also remain taboo. This is strangely often communicated by the bra’s connection to a glamorised body—the visible bra on a supermodel is celebrated, while the bra as isolated object becomes awkward. This contradiction motivated me to investigate the potential of bras as a material to engage thinking around expansive representations of the gendered and sexualised body.
Second-hand bras were sourced locally from op shops, as well as collected from my community. Staff in op shops raised many eyebrows as I approached the counters with armfuls of bras in various sizes and shapes. People donating their own bras often provided disclaimers regarding the condition or style of bras, and some discomfort was evident in most (but not all) encounters. These responses demonstrated the way bras operated as taboo for both men and women, and I was able to postulate that this signifier would be potent within my project. Regardless of the discomfort of such intimate exchanges, many people from a range of ages, sizes, personalities, and even sexes willingly donated their used underwear. I am deeply grateful to everyone who donated to the project, and therefore shared with me their private and sometimes surprising underclothing.

The making process began with a process of deconstruction where the bras were taken apart to reveal their structures and potential. Much like working with the hot glue, I spent time investigating the material qualities and construction potential of the material. This was a surprising and revealing process. Many of the bras had hidden layers of unexpected materials, such as foam in various thicknesses and densities, inserts, boning and even gel cushions, along with layers of satin, lace, cotton, and other fabrics, and of course variations of straps and clasps. I invited colleagues and peers into my studio to look at my material findings. All were surprised by the unusual materiality of the deconstructed bras. While they had been taboo in their complete form, once in parts spread across my workbench, they were now approachable, and people wanted to touch and fondle these strange artefacts. I wondered why these bits and pieces were so engaging, and whether they would maintain this mysterious effect once reconstructed into new objects.
Initial pieces were constructed that exploited and highlighted structural elements, such as underwire and straps. One early piece was fashioned from a single bra cup, utilising its existing strap to extend around the neck and rejoin to the other side of the cup. I enjoyed the absurd humour in this piece that resembled a handbag (See centre image Fig. 76) and hoped I could resolve this further through a process of extended thinking-through-making.

Cut up pieces were laid out on my desk to create various compositions, rearranging and photographing ideas until potential was identified. This process was based on mostly personal aesthetic judgements, but also took into consideration compositions that suggested sexual/ised narratives or created feelings of the uncanny. I was interested in teasing out contradictions within the works, which would allow for multiple readings of each piece; i.e. familiar/unfamiliar, normal/perverse, humour/darkness.
Successful compositions were pinned together and held up against my body where they could be altered to fit to my form. This process ensured the shapes left a space for the absent body, supporting a type of bodily affordance. While these pieces would be displayed sculpturally in the gallery space without the body, I wanted to ensure the trace of the body was evident in the forms. Each piece was tediously hand stitched with neat and discreet stitching, a bodily process of intense connection between my body and the resulting artworks. Some additional materials were incorporated to refine the pieces (such as to hem the edges) these included satin ribbons and bicycle tubes. An extended collection of pieces was produced, but only five were selected for this exhibition. Each express individual features suggestive of different signifiers.

**Collar** is made from two underwire cups forming a neckband (where most of the padded cups have been removed), with three straps hanging down, two at the front (like a collar) and one at the back in the centre (Fig. 78). This piece expresses connotations of the church, referencing a ‘preaching band’ sometimes attached to clerical collars worn by priests, but also suggests a traditional ruff, also worn around the neck.

**Inversion** plays around with the straps of multiple bras, reforming them in altered ways. There are five separate clasps on the piece (all bra fittings), which allow it to be reconfigured in numerous ways. **Inversion** is a surprising piece as it appears quite simple and therefore viewers may be unaware of the many possible options for engagement. This could be a metaphor for women who are often underestimated and multi-faceted. It represents a kind of puzzle to me. *Why would it have so many clasps?* This is accentuated by the addition of adjustable straps, which can alter the scale of the piece.

**Waisted** also plays with wearable ambiguity and has the potential for various interactions. It can be draped around the neck with the two larger cups hanging down to fall around the waist, close to the genital area. However the end pieces can also be flung over the shoulders via the long straps like a scarf. In fact, this piece can go anywhere on the body as it has no specified
hole for fitting a body part into, rather it could be wrapped around a wrist, a leg, or even used to tie two limbs together.

A lumpy, bumpy neckpiece titled *Divulge* is a significant piece in the series, inspired by the lumpy latex outfit Louise Bourgeois wore in 1975 (Fig. 81). My version is minimalist compared with her flamboyant costume, yet the voluptuous curves still have a powerful effect, recalling the curves of the female sexual/ised body.

Finally, *Pocket Square* is a laboriously crafted chest plate with multiple soft bra cups. One pink cup in nestled in the blackness, representing a handkerchief popping out from a man’s suit pocket. A masculine/feminine aspect of the work is teased out by this reference to the format of a male fashion item, curiously constructed out of female underwear.

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**Fig. 78:** Tassia Joannides, *Collar*, 2013. Photo: Matthew Stanton.

**Fig. 79:** Tassia Joannides, *Inversion*, 2014. Photo: Kate Mollison.

**Fig. 80:** Tassia Joannides, *Waisted*, 2013.

**Fig. 81:** Tassia Joannides, *Divulge*, 2013.

**Fig. 82:** Tassia Joannides, *Pocket Square*, 2013.
All five pieces contain elements of the banal situated beside the bizarre to subtly entice and confuse the viewer. Viewed together they create a cohesive body of work that leaves room for questioning and interpretation. The bra operates as a highly recognisable signifier of stereotypical female sexual/ised subjectivity, as it substitutes for the compelling form of the breast. This association remains strong even when the bra forms are altered and their function is transformed. A strangely sexual presence is still visible in the new objects, enhanced by associations with fetish accessories.

A sixth piece was fabricated that was eventually edited from the exhibition (but appears in the final exhibition), a pink ‘breastplate’ that experimented with bringing pale flesh tones into the work. Opposed to the mysterious, black pieces that conjured fetish, this piece embodied stereotypically feminine qualities of delicacy and softness. The description of ‘breastplate’ was chosen to connote a type of armour, implying that women must ready themselves for battle. The piece was filled with delicious contradictions, due to also being associated with notions of motherhood and nurturing, perhaps increased by general perceptions of maternity bras.

Fig. 83: Tassia Joannides, Supporting, 2013. Photo: Matthew Stanton.
American artist Lauren Kalman also utilises underwear in her provocative series *Spectacular* (2012), which draws on representations of engorged body parts resulting from elephantiasis. In contrast to my own work, Kalman explores connections between body deformations and adornment. Kalman exemplifies a new wave of artists with a background in contemporary jewellery who have moved from “the body as site to the body as subject” (Kalman cited in Cummins). In one piece, entitled *Tits* (Fig. 84), large sagging shapes expand out from bra cups. The piece is represented in exhibition across the formats of photography and video, as well as presentation of the object itself. Her practice utilises these various modes of presentation to interrogate the power dynamics of “the imaged body in contrast to realities of the physical body” (Kalman). While Kalman repeatedly layers these three modes of presenting the body simultaneously in exhibition, I had used the *Embodied* exhibition to test each medium separately.

![Fig. 84: Lauren Kalman, Spectacular (Tits), 2012, fabric, mixed media. Courtesy of the artist.](image1)

![Fig. 85: Lauren Kalman, Tit, 2012, video still of HD video loop of three images. Courtesy of the artist.](image2)

![Fig. 86: Louise Bourgeois wearing a latex cast of her work Avenza, 1975. Photo: Peter Moore.](image3)

Although wearable, the bra works I had produced were created for exhibition as sculptural objects, allowing them to suggest the body in its absence. However, unable to completely let go of framing the body through image, I experimented with photography as part of the making process, again curious about the way gendered representations of bodies affect the way we understand objects. I was interested to play with the religious symbolism of the *Collar* piece by photographing it on a naked male chest (Fig. 87). The pink
breastplate was also examined on the male form, producing surprising results. The male body complicated the reading of the work in ways I could hardly find language for. The play on perceptions of hard and soft, strong and vulnerable, contradict gender norms and perplex the viewer. I found the images strangely confronting and troubling, opening up a whole new set of questions. I therefore concluded that the images might be foundational material for a future project, as while they were clearly potent, the subject matter was shifted outside of the parameters of the PhD.

Fig. 87: Tassia Joannides, Collar (worn on male), 2013, Photo: Matthew Stanton.

Fig. 88: Tassia Joannides, Supporting (worn on male), 2013, Photo: Matthew Stanton.

It made sense that as I approached the final phase of creative outputs, the works required increased focus on my subject of sexual/ised female subjectivity. The male body had been included in both the Liquid Bodies project and in the Sticker Series to gain knowledge about gendered representations by enabling comparison. However, it was now time to let go of the male body to allow the work to funnel down into final resolved works.

And then something unexpected happened. After photographing the breastplate on my own body, I realised that the female body did not belong in the work either. The portraiture style of the image forced me to recognise my own female form and identity in the work, and to reflect on the significance of my specific (slender, white) and gendered body within the project, leading to the realisation that the physical body is never ‘neutral’. The inclusion of my
body framed the work for a particular subjectivity, rather than allowing for multiple or expansive representation.

But it was not just my particular body, but any female body now seemed unnecessary as a strategy to create bodily content, as this could be achieved through materials. The physical body was no longer required or desired. Material substitutes were proving to be capable of suitable substitution for the body.

As the works increased in their ability to convey bodily form and texture, the physical body (male or female) was becoming redundant. I was therefore able to concentrate on installing the works as isolated objects, relying on their ability to evoke the body in the mind of the viewer.

Two different modes of presentation were tested through installation mechanisms. The two larger pieces (*Divulge* and *Pocket Square*) were chosen to sit on plinth tops to emphasise their sculptural qualities. *Collar, Inversion* and *Waisted* were hung on the wall at roughly neck height, encouraging bodily relationships. These installation strategies were employed
to inspire the audience to project themselves into the work and imagine what it might be like to wear or handle the objects.

The decision to separate the series into two separate modes of installation allowed me to observe how such mechanisms affected the reading of the works. The plinths forced people to look down over the works, delegating them to static objects, now more precious, but also less engaging. At waist height, their bodily affordances were not as identifiable, while the works on the wall supported a relational association with the bodies of the audience, where proximity to potential encounters was increased. They also formed a strong dialogue with the bodies represented in the Sticker Series, installed on the adjoining wall. These works all converse about the body site of the neck and aim to accentuate its role as an erogenous zone.

![Fig. 90: Installation shot of works at fortyfivedownstairs. Photo: Kate Mollison.](image)

While constructing a bodily narrative, these pieces expand off from the physical body, and begin to become bodies themselves. Their connection to female sexual/ised subjectivity is now produced via materials, rather than the human form. Their ambiguous wearability and layering of content encourage multiple readings and understandings of the works, expanding out from stereotypical forms and into new and unusual ones.
Reflections on Embodied

This exhibition was an opportunity to further investigate the interdisciplinary positioning of my practice, and to assess the creative results of three specific modes of practice. Within this trio of works, a key aim was to re-introduce a sexual/ised narrative that was heavily diluted in the Liquid Bodies project. This was achieved by returning to the skin as site within the Sticker Series, by bringing my own female body physically into the gallery space in Body Badges, and by utilising potent signifiers of desire in the Embodied Series of bra works. Within these diverse, yet related outcomes I identified that sexuality and gender had successfully become more visible in the works, without falling into overtly sexual/ised imagery.

It was through these multiple forms of communication that the project interrogated the idea of the Material Body, considering both the body as a material and also materials as bodies—materials that display anthropomorphic qualities. These two interpretations of human corporeality consider the suggestion of body (through wearable objects and material surrogates), and the intimacy of a body encountered (through performance and photography). Importantly, exploring these multiple modes of bodily representation allowed me to review the perception of the body within the works, revealing that the physical body (via performance or photography) could be successfully replaced through material substitution.

Bras were identified as effective signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality, which can be successfully transformed to confuse expected codes of gender and sexuality to create more complicated narratives. The bra works had developed into types of bodies themselves, which now sat more comfortably in a space between subtle and overt sexual narratives. This material would therefore continue to be investigated in the final project for this PhD, Divulge.
Divulge was a solo exhibition of sculptural works exploring sexuality, gender and the complications of desire, exhibited at Trocadero Artspace (Footscray, VIC) in November 2014. This work marked a point of departure in my practice, mostly demonstrated through a shift towards purely sculptural elements. Up until this point sculptural works were largely designed to interact with the performative physical body. In Divulge, sculptures no longer rely on interaction with the body, but become bodily forms in themselves, and suggest the body without the need for its actual re/presentation. These material bodies explore sexuality and the body in a more abstract way by using material signifiers, such as bras, to produce artworks that expand representations of sexual/ised female subjectivity. This pivotal solo exhibition was comprised of six works:

- *Slave, Persuasion* and *Vixen* (second-hand bras)
- *Madame S* and *Lady V* (mesh)
- *Best of Bizarre* (mixed media)

In this chapter, each of these works is discussed individually within material groupings to allow focus on selected materials and the significance attributed to each. Discussion of the works is prefaced by an overview of the transition to sculptural practice, detailing the first sculpture of this series and some of the key shifts in methods and scale. This is followed by a discussion of pre-exhibition installation testing, which was crucial to the planning of a unified collection of works.

As a cohesive body of work, the exhibition aimed to tease out the complications and contradictions of such complex phenomenon as gender, desire and sexuality, presented through material transformations of second-hand bras, flywire, tulle, bicycle tubes and haberdashery items.
Expanding Material Bodies

This section discusses the critical shift to larger scale sculptural works that transition away from representation of the physical body in terms of live performance and photographic documentation. While most previous works relied on the physical body for activation, these purely sculptural forms create their own bodily presence within the gallery space. This is supported by the lack of any single identity being represented, which opens up possibilities for the imagination. The known corporeal body becomes a speculative body. The development of these larger works required me to adapt my making processes, modify techniques and cultivate new ones as required. In this section I plot the thinking and making processes that were key to the shift in scale and in practice, via the conception and construction of a new body, one made from lingerie.

Initially I envisioned a form of relatable body size—roughly the scale of a torso—that could be held or interacted with similarly to that of another human body. The aim was to create a body in itself, rather than constructions that could be worn on the body. Reference to the body was enhanced by the use of pale flesh tones that were tested in the breastplate Supporting, where I had identified strong anthropomorphic qualities within the colour palette.
Once again relying on donations from my community plus some local second-hand purchases, my studio was transformed into a lingerie filled zone. I was interested in how unsettling the space became for many visitors, and sometimes even for myself. Not only was there a discomfort in the unexpected intimacy of the objects, but also a strange feeling of the abject and grotesque body evident in the cut up bodily shapes.

Initially individual bra cups were cut out and laid on a studio desk, before being arranged in a manner somewhat like piecing together a jigsaw puzzle. As the shape grew and began to curve, the form had to be suspended from the ceiling, enabling flexibility for my body to move around the piece as I fabricated it.

![Fig. 92: Works in progress: (left) tables with ‘raw materials’; (right) sculpture taking shape, 2014.](image)

The unusual form also required eclectic improvisation with aids that would hold parts in place until they were properly secured. Butterfly clips, paper clips, sewing pins and jeweller’s lockjaw tweezers\(^{43}\) were all used to support the emerging shape while I meticulously hand stitched small, evenly spaced stitches in similar pale fleshy tones of thread. These stitches are visible on close inspection, but subtle from a distance, allowing initial focus on the form, prior to observation of its laborious construction.

\(^{43}\) Lockjaw tweezers are a jewellery hand tool that work in the opposite way to conventional tweezers. When squeezed they open, and when resting they ‘lock’ closed tightly.
Traditional hand skills were essential to my methodology throughout the PhD project. Here again my embodied approach to making was evident in the slow process of working closely with materials and learning about their intimate characteristics.

Louise Bourgeois, whose fabric sculptures also capture elements of the body, similarly favoured stitching by hand. This slow and laborious process is evident in many of her iconic fabric sculptures, often depicting bodies or parts of bodies with clearly visible stitching on the outside of the works (rather than hidden on the inside). This visible stitching appears in works such as Do Not Abandon Me (1999), a pink patchwork fabric sculpture depicting a female body giving birth to a baby. The baby lies between her legs, it’s feet still inside their mother in the process of birth, and yet an umbilical cord connects their two bodies externally from the belly of the mother to the child. The stitching of the seams are visibly rough and varied in size and distance between stitches, they also vary in colour—some are pink and some are white, bringing further attention to them as a visual features. Although Bourgeois’ stitching appears messy and untrained, it is clear that these stitches were intentionally created with this aesthetic, as her background working in tapestry repair would have provided her with a high level of technical skill in hand stitching\(^{44}\). Therefore, her stitches can be likened to evocative brush strokes on canvas, placed with purpose and communicating deep emotional connection. While Bourgeois’ stitching was a part of her family background, it was also a personal process of repair for her emotions, a way for her to work through painful memories.

\(^{44}\) Her mother ran a tapestry restoration business that Bourgeois worked in from a young age.
For me, stitching is a practical way of slowing down the making process, of allowing time to engage fully with the materiality of my sculptures, and of attempting to control every detail. Differing to Bourgeois, my hand stitching is an exercise in meticulous application, where each stitch is placed so that it creates even and discrete connections between panels of fabric. Although my stitching is less expressive in its neat presentation, I imagine the imprint of my body and labour becoming imbued within each piece, offering the audience a trace of performed making. I am attracted to the simplicity of cutting and stitching, an honest and transparent process of altering information. Art historian and critic Germano Celant celebrated the process of Bourgeois' fabric construction of sculptures, likening this process to that of early Cubist collages.

Cutting out and organizing forms and figures, images and materials on the surface and in space was a radical process, as it has modified the way we perceive reality as well as constructed a new one (2010, p. 14).

In attempting to assemble new forms myself, a fabric collar and lead were designed and attached to the body of the sculpture. The use of clothing evokes a familiar relationship with dressing and wearing, enabling the audience to imagine possible interaction with the artwork, a strategy also employed by Studio Orta (the artistic collaboration of English artist Lucy Orta and her partner Argentine artist Jorge Orta). Studio Orta have often worked on creating pieces that are capable of joining multiple bodies, such as
Siamese Armour (2003–04), where leads connect multiple affordances for the neck. While this work was engaged in performance showing up to four bodies wearing the piece, the traces of the body remain visible in the piece even when installed as a sculpture, suggesting possible bodily encounters.

My own sculpture is left purposefully ambiguous by the lack of performative activation or documentation of the work being ‘worn’. The outcome is a sculptural piece that has an element of possible wearability via a connection to clothing, but exists as a bodily form in isolation.

This more speculative format of sculpture allowed for an increasingly ambiguous affordance to remain, as the works moved further away from the type of wearability related to the conventions of jewellery (for example the necklace format used in the Embodied works). This progression into a more clearly defined interdisciplinary practice also enables the further expansion of possible interpretations of the works.

Before Divulging… Installation and Testing

The Divulge exhibition was my first solo show of purely sculptural works. In planning the installation it was crucial that I was able to visualise how the sculptures would relate to each other in the gallery space, so I staged a test installation of three works in an environment similar to the gallery space. This allowed me to evaluate how the works might relate to each other within a
gallery environment, to test various installation strategies, and to visualise the amount of work required for the space.

Three artworks were trialled: the freshly completed bra sculpture, a wall installation which utilised works from the *Embodied* series, and a crepe paper piece which was a development from the material case studies (discussed in Chapter Three).

![Fig. 96: The three works trialled in installation at the Gossard Space, RMIT in Melbourne, VIC, 2014.](image)

The bra sculpture was trialled in various installation modes, such as on a plinth, hanging on a wall, and suspended, before concluding it would operate best on the floor, unsupported. This placement would allow viewers to look down onto the piece, encouraging feelings of empathy towards this soft, lumpy body. Its isolation assisted the communication of its status as a substitute body (as opposed to being an object on a plinth).
The crepe paper coils were also considered for suspension, initially tested on a circular disc. The circular form was chosen to echo the circles of the coils, with each representing the protrusions of nipples. However, a second option was explored where the nipple forms were installed on a table top and I enjoyed how this opened up a range of interpretations, such as the transformation of the surface into a landscape. I also considered the potentially anthropomorphic qualities of the table legs to be appealing.

Initially my intent was to cover the table surface, but on the day of the install I discovered there were not enough crepe paper coils. Rather than space them out across the surface, I pushed them all towards one end creating a visual disruption. While I saw potential in the piece, I considered that it would need further exploration to resolve fully, and was not convinced that it was working cohesively with the other works in the space.
The third element installed was an extension of the *Embodied* wearable series, where works were shifted out of the wearable realm and into more ambiguous territory. The aim was to utilise some of the existing *Embodied* pieces and to mix in a selection of parts that would further confuse their potential affordances. Some works were joined together to create new forms, such as the pink breastplate joining onto one of the black *Embodied* pieces to become a larger singular piece. Other items were introduced, such as a half deconstructed bra, a bra strap, and a metal bike tube valve still attached to part of the rubber tube. Some of these oddities are sexually suggestive (such as the bike valve evocative of phallic forms) offering the viewer some subtle clues for interpreting the work, whilst remaining inconclusive.

To enhance a sexual narrative I played with the qualities of S&M by experimenting with an installation that would reference a dungeon wall. A backdrop was created from a sheet of black satin, which I cut to an irregular...
shape that was something between an oval and a rectangle. This unusual silhouette is purposfully peculiar, contributing to the unease within this piece.

The satin was pinned to the wall around the perimeter, and the sculptural pieces were hung by pins on top of this in a type of museological display. Rather than being pinned through the fabric of the sculptures, the pins were installed first, and the pieces placed over them, suggesting they could be removed and replaced, signifying possible use.

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 100**: Install test: detail of expanding the *Embodied* series, 2014.

The three works were positioned in a test environment with generous spacing between pieces. Here I was able to assess the relationships forming between
the sculptures, and make decisions about the direction that the work would take as I expanded and refined it for exhibition.

![Fig. 101: Install test: installation shot in the Gossard Space, RMIT in Melbourne, VIC, 2014.](image)

I enjoyed the playful nature of the unusual grouping of the wall installation and saw potential for it to be further developed. However the reference to an S&M dungeon wall had proven to be too singular in its interpretation. I wanted the works to operate on the boundary of desire, not to illustrate it in any literal way. I realised that the seductive connotations of the satin were overpowering, and that the install strategy would have to be reconsidered to allow for more ambiguous readings. The development of this work will be discussed in the section below titled *Mixing it up: Best of Bizarre*.

The most successful outcome was identified in the lumpy bra sculpture, which displayed a strong bodily presence within a gallery environment. Its voluptuous form was clearly linked to narratives of female sexual/ised subjectivity, demonstrated in its anthropomorphic qualities and use of sexually evocative materials. I decided to continue investigating the potential of bras by constructing other ‘bodies’ with different ‘personalities’ to accompany it. These will be discussed in the next section.

The crepe paper work was considered unresolved and not to be operating cohesively with the other works. The sharp angular lines of the table conflicted with the organic forms of the rest of the works. I observed that it was opening
a new conversation between formal elements in the space, which could become a distraction from my focused inquiry. The table and crepe paper were therefore removed, however I felt that another material needed to be brought into the gallery environment, something to counterbalance the dominance of the bra works. This led me to return to another material from the case studies: mesh. Two works from this material—one existing and one new work—were chosen for the *Divulge* exhibition and are discussed in the following section *Return of Mesh: Madame S & Lady V*.

![Fig. 102: Install test shots: showing relationships between pieces.](image)

The process of executing an installation test prior to the *Divulge* exhibition enabled me to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of work in the lead up to the show. It allowed me to observe the way works were relating to each other, and to make alterations (such as the decision to remove the table and crepe paper and to re-visit working with mesh). I was able to reflect on the design of the exhibition layout, with a clearer idea of the amount of works required for the space.

In the following section I reflect individually on the final works produced for the exhibition, grouped by the materials investigated. Six pieces were constructed and refined for the exhibition resulting in a finely curated selection of works that play off and balance each other. The relationships and installation composition will be discussed at the conclusion in this chapter where I reflect upon the exhibition as a whole.
Lingerie Bodies: Slave, Persuasion and Vixen

After identifying the capacity of the flesh toned bra sculpture to signify a female body and open up multiple potential narratives, further experiments were conducted with bras as material. Two additional finished outcomes were completed resulting in a series of three bra sculptures being included in the exhibition. Similar in scale, but different in ‘personality’, each piece has distinct characteristics that engage with ideas of female sexual/ised identity and representation. The works portray multiple dualisms and contradictions that are ultimately enhanced by the choice of gendered and sexualised clothing as material. The bras suggest the naked body, but also act as a body sheath, or second skin. As Di Trocchio explains:

Underwear complicates the traditional paradigm of the naked and the clothed, rendering the body both simultaneously dressed and undressed (2008, p. 67).

It is this transformative and slippery potential of underwear to reference both the clothed and naked body that makes it so potent as a signifier of female sexuality. Here, lingerie references the traditional paradox of the stereotypical roles that women are typically depicted in popular culture, such as the mother/virgin and seductress/whore. These roles are explored in the following three works: Slave, Persuasion and Vixen.
The pillow shaped form of *Slave* features a surface of breast-like protrusions, yet due to its modest stuffing, it sags in some areas, lacking plumpness. It is a feminised body, a gendered body and a politicised body. Simultaneously *dressed* and *undressed*, the piece plays on the potential of lingerie to complicate the way that the body is perceived. Whilst the object is made of bras, not breasts, it is easy to make this connection in one’s mind.

English artist Sarah Lucas also utilises lingerie to suggest the naked body in works such as *NUD’s* (2009–10), a series of sculptures that suggest abstracted and multiple contorted limbs. Employing stockings filled with cushion stuffing, Lucas’ *NUD’s* are easily perceived as distinctly female, based on their ‘wearing’ of stockings (even while they are simultaneously ‘stocking bodies’). Lisa Le Feuvre reflects on Lucas’ use of this common material in her essay ‘Ordinary Things’ writing “Tights are designed to make naked flesh acceptable, to take away the scars and discolorations that evidence experience and pumping blood. They are gender specific, worn by women, or by men dressed as women” (2012, p. 14). Although stockings can
be used to cover imperfections, their transparent nature in *NUD*’s allows for the creases of stuffing to show through resembling veins or bruises, enabling the audience to indulge in perception of these objects as corporeal bodies.

By contrast *Slave* is a ‘neatly’ abject body. Bodily in both its curvaceous form and flesh colouring, the element of its smooth fabric texture separates it from operating as an overtly visceral body, such as those exhibited in the works of Australian artist Patricia Piccinini. Piccinini masterfully captures the texture of skin in her sculptures, depicting a grotesquely abject quality, while *Slave* operates as a body that sits more politely on the edge of dressed/undressed. The knowledge of the materials as second-hand brings the notion of the abject a little closer via their imagined prior intimacy with the sexual body, yet the intricately constructed decorative amalgamation of bras brings us back to the notion of underwear, and paradoxically back again to the naked (female) body. Kristeva says that “abjection is above all ambiguity” (1982 p. 9)—a quality that my work aims to exploit, by situating constantly in a space where multiple readings are possible.

![Image](image1.png)

**Fig. 104**: Patricia Piccinini, *Sphinx*, 2012, silicone, fibreglass, human and animal hair, bronze, 112 x 110 x 55 cm. Courtesy of the artist, Tolarno Galleries and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery.

![Image](image2.png)

**Fig. 105**: Sarah Lucas, *NUD 2*, 2009, tights, fluff, wire, breeze-blocks, MDF plinth.

The visual connection to breasts is clearly evident (although they are absent) connecting the piece to narratives of motherhood and breastfeeding. This is particularly strong due to the soft pink flesh coloured bras used in *Slave*, which seem to enhance the stereotype of woman as ‘good mother’.
This is interrupted by the inclusion of the collar and lead, which introduce connotations of fetish and bondage. The collar could be worn around the neck, however the strap or ‘lead’ has been made intentionally short, meaning that a wearer would either have to pick up the attached bra sculpture and carry it around with them, or have it hanging from their neck. Alternatively, they would be obligated to position their body down on the ground to put the collar on. These possible interactions remain imagined (as opposed to presented via performance or documentation); the bodily affordances of the piece operate as an invitation to the audience, a way of enticing them to engage further with the curious nature of the object.

Aside from proposing the lead and collar as potential instruments of bondage, the piece also comments on the power dynamics of the beauty industry. Responding to Naomi Wolf’s conclusions that the industry intentionally regulates women’s bodies as a form of oppression, Slave visually alludes to an imprisoning ‘ball and chain’ where bras are weighing down the enslaved wearer. Slave can thus be interpreted as a comment on women’s slavery to beauty norms, such as wearing bras and keeping nipples covered.

Though references such as the ball and chain are discernible, the piece ultimately remains ambiguous in its intent. There is a layering of dualisms and opposites in this body of artworks, which construct various subtle (and often personal) political narratives. These themes are presented via suggestion, rather than as a statement, and Slave is open to multiple analyses. It is designed to direct viewers towards a range of interpretations, all of which comment on the female body as subject and object.
Similar to *Slave*, *Persuasion* is constructed mostly from bra cups, except for the two ends of its pod-like shape, which utilise straps from the back section of bras and draws the piece into two opposing ends. The pod shape has often recurred in my practice as a fertility reference, the seed shape can also be interpreted as a reference to the vulva. This piece is quite plump, as it has been fully stuffed to maintain its defined lumpy form.

While *Slave* utilised pale pink flesh tones, largely representing the mother archetype, *Persuasion* is half pale flesh tones, and half black lace bras. The two colours converge at the centre of the piece, where black and pale flesh coloured lace bras assist the seepage of one colour into another. The separation begins to represent two sides—the two extremes of representation of female sexuality within Western popular culture—the clichés of the virgin and the whore. Soloway refers to this dichotomy as “the divided feminine” (Soloway 2016) drawing on the many examples in television and film where women are divided into opposing stereotypical categories in order to construct male oriented storylines. She says:
…so they call us the Madonna and the Whore…They say ‘the one I wanna marry and the one I wanna fuck’ (Soloway 2016).

Soloway’s words might be blunt, but this only serves to demonstrate her exhaustion at witnessing these repeated stereotypes that are consistently played out in visual media such as film, television and advertising. Irigaray interrogates these dichotomies through her fictional character of Alice (reminiscent of Alice in Wonderland) in the opening of This Sex Which Is Not One (1985), asking:

What’s the difference between a friend and no friend? A virgin and a whore? Your wife and the woman you love? The one you desire and the one you make love with? One woman and another woman? (p. 10).

These questions suggest the proposition that women must choose a character to play from the two available options, which according to Soloway enable the “activat[ion] of male lives” (Soloway 2016). Soloway says “the male gaze divides us” and “shames our desire” (Soloway 2016), a desire which is commonly portrayed through the character of the ‘whore’. Conversely, the virgin/mother rarely displays her own desires, as at the opposing end of the scale she is generally perceived to have none. Each of the extremes within the virgin/whore dichotomy has negative connotations, leaving women in a paradoxical position, “the impossible role” (Irigaray 1985, p. 83) of being a woman.

Persuasion attempts to embody and challenge the battle between these two clichés, represented through stereotypical material and colour use. The flesh toned bras suggest ‘good’, ‘pure’ and ‘normal’, while black lace denotes ‘sexual’ ‘mysterious’ and ‘evil’.

This piece is about the conflict between one element and another, represented in the use of the two colours. It symbolises a power struggle: good versus bad, the virgin versus the whore, woman versus woman, woman versus herself. The centre section further complicates the piece as it could be
understood as the ‘good’ virgin mother taking over the ‘evil’ seductress, or it could equally be viewed the other way around. Toying with our desire to know the truth of the object in front of us, the title *Persuasion* attempts to provoke the curiosity of the viewer in terms of who and what is being persuaded?

South African artist Nichoals Hlobo also plays with “the world of the known and the unknown” (Hlobo 2006, p. 14) in his piece *Ndiyafuna* (2006), where it is unclear whether the figure is reaching into a bag or being swallowed by it (Fig. 107). Hlobo’s works successfully provokes curiosity in the audience, as his suggestive yet ambiguous sculptures cannot be pinned to a single narrative.

*Persuasion* is compressed down into a pod-like capsule, petite, yet bulging from within. It cannot communicate which side is taking over the other for it does not know itself.

It is interesting to note the different readings this piece offers in comparison to *Slave*, the darkness that is taking over the form changes its reading from ‘motherly’ object to ‘curious’ object, yet it remains politically ambiguous. Perhaps it is because it represents a middle ground? Not quite a pink fleshy motherly form, and not quite a totally black, dark seductress, but somewhere in-between the clichés of virgin and whore.
VIXEN

**Fig. 108:** Tassia Joannides, *Vixen*, 2014, second-hand bras, thread, dimensions variable.

*Vixen* is the smallest piece, yet it holds significant presence due to the form being suspended from the ceiling by three long straps. The straps are adjustable black bra shoulder straps, connected together and enabling the length to be altered depending on the exhibition space. The form itself is the most complicated of the three bra sculptures, with an asymmetrical outline and variations in construction technique. In this piece, the bra cups have repeatedly been joined in pairs first, creating protrusions like half a globe. These elements are combined with the inclusion of multiple fabric sections from the back of bras, creating areas of flatness amidst the protrusions. The piece is mostly black, with the exception of two randomly positioned red bra cups with a black lace cover.

The lack of pale flesh tones has the effect of increasing the object quality of the sculpture, as the piece becomes suggestive of a bizarre sex toy. This is enhanced by its suspended position while *Slave* and *Persuasion* lay directly on the floor. The introduction of two red cups transforms the piece by
increasing the narrative of fetish and seduction, further highlighted by the title \textit{Vixen}, suggesting its association with the role of the seductress. The black and red body suspended by straps also reference the redback spider, a deadly species readily linked to the perceived danger of a woman’s sexuality.

\textit{Vixen} utilises many of the clichés of sexual representation. The black bra straps that suspend the piece from the ceiling enhance these clichés, extending the notion of fetish and BDSM. They also assist to bring a sense of tension into the piece, suggesting that although the piece appears quite solid, it may also be potentially fragile, adding to the layering of paradox and contradiction embedded in the works. Artist Talitha Kennedy (Australia) also embraces paradox in her work through material forms. She states:

Paradoxes are a part of our experience of the world even if they cannot be expressed through language. But in art I can test the tensions between such conflicting sensations as fear and comfort, control and surrender, life and death (cited in TogArt Contemporary Art Award 2012, p. 61).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{vixen.jpg}
\caption{Talitha Kennedy, \textit{Pounding Mountains}, 2013, kangaroo leather, thread and gravel, 10 x 15 x 14 cm. Courtesy of the artist.}
\end{figure}

Kennedy uses soft sculptures to work through the contradictions between her modern lifestyle and her love of nature (Kennedy cited in TogArt Contemporary Art Award 2012, p. 61). Using construction methods similar to my own, Kennedy hand-stitches her sculptures, utilising leather as a literal ‘skin’. Although Kennedy’s works are black leather sculptures, they are not related to fetish. Instead, Kennedy’s pieces reflect the shape of landscapes rather than bodies, as she looks for agency in the natural environment. By
contrast *Vixen* aims to amplify the sexualised qualities of the black fabric, addressing and embracing the contradictions and paradoxes that have emerged for me in this project. The archetype of the vixen is always in paradox, as she is desired for the same reason that she is deemed undesirable.

**Return of Mesh: *Lady V & Madame S***

The strangely captivating qualities of mesh were initially identified during the material case studies discussed in Chapter Three, where I engaged with its seductive visual qualities and potential. Mesh engages with notions of revealing and concealing, particularly key within fetish and seductive clothing. I decided to include *Lady V* (completed during the case studies) in the *Divulge* exhibition, along with a new exploration of mesh in the form of a hanging sculpture titled *Madame S*. This pair of works continues the strategy of pairing and balance explored in this series of related works.

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**Fig. 110**: Tassia Joannides, *Lady V*, 2012, tulle mesh, zipper, thread, 130 x 110 cm. (left) full piece and (right) detail.
Lady V employs the same slightly unsettling outline that appeared in the installation testing of a black satin backdrop that was not quite oval, nor rectangular, now split by a red zipper hand sewn with black thread. The stitches are neat horizontal lines one above another, each about a centimetre long. At the bottom of the zipper, two tendrils of black thread are left hanging down. The zipper has been left slightly opened at the top, about ten centimetres, allowing a small gap of clear vision through to the wall behind (Fig. 110).

Hung on the wall by two nails, Lady V sits mostly flat against the wall, except for the sides, folding in slightly where the nails fasten to the wall, displaying the materiality of the fabric. The mesh itself creates a moray effect, generating captivating yet subtle patterns to the eye as you move around the space.

The single red line down the centre of the piece with a small opening can be interpreted as the entrance to the vagina, and the oval shape as the surrounding vulva. The title Lady V attempts to make this interpretation more obvious by enhancing a female narrative: ‘Lady’ is female, and ‘V’ is for vagina. This piece has received varied feedback, with many reporting it as their favourite, while others have described discomfort with it. The unusual shape is unsettling for some, and it stands out in the exhibition as the least refined piece in terms of labour and finish. It has not been meticulously crafted like the objects around it in the space. The edges have not been hemmed and black threads are left to dangle at the bottom of the zipper instead of being neatly tucked away. In a very minimalist way, this gesture represents female pubic hair that is so often curated or eradicated within Western culture. Trimmed, shaved, waxed, dyed and lasered, it is considered unsightly and best to reduce or remove where possible. The black threads are a subtle way of bringing pubic hair into the public realm.

Overall, the piece is the least complicated of the final series of works, yet its simplicity could also be what makes it curious. Appearing like a crude or naïve drawing of female genitals, reduced to an oval and a line, Lady V remains ambiguous. Is it a parody or a homage?
In Sarah Lucas’ sculptural works genitals are evoked with humour, although Lucas “resists adding some final artistic flourish to help us feel dead certain that her work falls resolutely on the noble side of art, rather than that of ordinary things” (Williams 2012, p. 31). This playful ambiguity is enough to allow the audience to construct—and often question—their own reading of the work, such as in her piece *Au Natural* (1994; Fig. 111). In this seminal work, an old and stained mattress is slumped against a wall, on it Lucas has placed a cucumber and two oranges in an arrangement suggestive of male genitalia, beside it two melons extrude from cuts in the mattress holding them at what might be considered chest height, with a bucket below that is provocatively positioned on its side, with its opening facing out to the audience. In response to this simple, yet complex work, contemporary art critic Gilda Williams writes:

We are left wondering, with some embarrassment, whether it is our or the artist’s dirty mind animating that gaping bucket, the mattress, the greengrocer’s goods (2012, p. 28).

*Lady V* attempts to utilise a similar language of parody and suggestion, yet it is more discreet, employing a minimalist aesthetic to enable the erotic piece to also engage other possible narratives.
**Fig. 112:** Tassia Joannides, *Madame S*, 2014, fly wire, zippers, satin ribbon, thread, 105 x 30 x 30 cm.

*Madame S* is a hanging pod form made from six panels like a lantern. Each panel is made from flywire mesh, hemmed with black satin, then joined with black zippers to the next panel. One of the joins is edged by pink satin and has a partially undone pink flesh coloured zipper, leaving an opening for consideration, and allusion to female genitalia. *Madame S* required intensive hand stitching, which is visible but discrete and precise.

Shaped like a long hanging seedpod, *Madame S* also echoes the form of a vulva, linking this piece both visually and conceptually to *Lady V*. The similarity in the titles further enhances their connection, while the pod shape also connects this piece visually to *Persuasion*, continuing the layered connections between pieces within the show. As well as suggesting a vulva,
the shape could also evoke other fetishised parts of a female body, in particular the section where the shape widens out like a pregnant bulge.

In addition to the lines of the naked body, Madame S is inspired by my previous studies of corset construction, a complex system utilising repeated panels. In Madame S the traditional corset shape is reversed (from wide at the ends and pulled tight in the centre, to narrow ends and wide in the centre) while still referencing the female form in the lines and shape of the sculpture. Instead of highlighting a tight waist, Madame S exhibits a full figure, suggesting the roundness of a swollen belly, breasts or buttocks.

Today the corset is often incorporated into ‘outerwear’ (such as in John Paul Gaultier’s couture creations), and even in some everyday apparel (particularly in gothic circles), while maintaining its connection to eroticism and fetish. However, it was once associated with respectable and privileged ladies, rendering it ethically problematic during its shift towards erotic object during the 1800s, as it was increasingly associated with working class women and prostitutes (Di Trocchio 2008 p. 67):

This cross-class appeal meant that corsets were ambiguously associated with respectability and honour, as well as scandal and cheapness, fuelling its erotic associations for men, as well as for women.

The corset in the nineteenth century therefore “embodied contradiction, as both an object of morality and of fetishistic lust” (Di Trocchio 2008 p. 67). The corset continues to be an object of inconsistency, a paradox similar to the archetype of the vixen. Madame S also plays on the erotic performance of the lengthily process of lacing a corset, described by Di Trocchio as a “metaphor for sexual intercourse” (2008 p. 67). However here lacing has been replaced by zippers, which suggest speed of concealing and revealing (dressing and undressing), rather than of symbolic penetration.
Mixing it up: Best of Bizarre

Utilising elements of the Embodied series, Best of Bizarre consists of a collection of ambiguous objects mounted in a cluster on a wall. It is the only work to purposefully incorporate multiple materials, as all other works in this PhD project have focussed on a single material. Best of Bizarre mixes it up by incorporating bras and flywire, as well as bicycle tubes, satin and other haberdashery materials commonly used to construct lingerie.

BEST OF BIZARRE

Fig. 113: Tassia Joannides, Best of Bizarre, 2014, fly wire, second-hand bras, bicycle tubes, satin ribbon, thread, dimensions variable.

Consolidating what was learnt from the Embodied series, Best of Bizarre utilises the notion of affordance to anchor the works within the realm of potential wearability. Accompanied by other more curious objects the works now step outside that realm into a space where their function becomes questionable. For example, some objects maintain a clear association with wearability (such as those brought in from the Embodied series), yet other elements complicate the possibility of wearing, such as a pod shaped panel directly matching those of Madame S. This piece has been purposefully included to create confusion in viewing, and to try to engage the audience in a type of game.
There is a clear suggestion of the absurd in this series, a narrative that is highlighted by the nonsensical gestures included in this wall of curiosities. This hints at an underlying tone of humour and play, but above all highlights a deep curiosity about the complications of sexuality and desire, and how this manifests as gendered and material cultural outcomes.

The title *Best of Bizarre* is taken from an early fetish publication. *Bizarre* magazine has been influential throughout this project,\(^{45}\) and has fuelled my fascination with the expressions of sexuality and strange desires displayed in its articles, photographs and hand drawn illustrations. I felt inspired by the celebration of areas of sexuality, such as BDSM, that are highly complicated and often elicit negative connotations.

![Fig. 114: Images from John Willie’s *Best of Bizarre*, Taschen, 2001.](image1)

BDSM was an initial inspiration for this wall work, with the black satin backdrop used in the installation testing intended to reference a dungeon wall. However, for the exhibition I decided to instead hang the works directly onto the gallery wall. Pieces were installed hanging off nails (not pinned to the wall), as if they could be picked up and put on or interacted with if desired. This detail assisted in maintaining a BDSM reference, but here on the white wall they also operated as art objects within the frame of the gallery.

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\(^{45}\) As was referenced in Chapter 4: *Liquid Bodies*, where prosthetic forms were inspired by Willie’s portrayal of fantasy prosthetics in fetish drawings.
While many materials and assemblages were trialled for this installation, a tightly curated selection was chosen as appropriate for the size of the gallery space, yet could be expanded or reduced in scale for other spaces.

The objects selected for Best of Bizarre include a mixture of meticulously crafted objects juxtaposed with more crude offerings. As a grouping, they offer multiple propositions: to wear or not to wear?; to use with the body?; responding to, or evocative of the body? In this way, Best of Bizarre echoes (and possibly mimics) the gestures of all the other works and unites them within the space.

Reflections on Divulge

The six completed works were exhibited in the solo exhibition Divulge at Trocadero Artspace. This exhibition proved to be pivotal for the PhD project, successfully bringing works off the physical body and transforming materials into bodies themselves. With the element of photography removed, these
material bodies were now able to form relations with the bodies of audience members in the gallery (as well as relating to each other within the space). While there was no performance element, I consider these works performative as they act as a substitute for the female body. This substitution is achieved through the use of female underwear and abstract bodily forms. The notion of clothing (and therefore also wearability/affordance) enables the reading of the works as dressed bodies or items for dressing the body, two themes that play off each other through the works.

Layers of signifiers and meanings are imbued within this collection of works, attempting to create highly nuanced outcomes for audience contemplation, consisting of two hanging sculptures, two wall works and two sculptures installed on the floor. Each piece is thoughtfully positioned to balance and counter-balance each other, and shapes and bodily references are repeated. In the final installation, fabric was used to elevate the two lingerie sculptures from the isolation of the floor. At the time this seemed appropriate to create a type of sensual bed for the works to lie on, a satin oval/square reflecting the shape of Lady V lay beneath Slave, and an oval/pod shape cut from flywire beneath Persuasion. The fabric gave these sculptures an increased presence in the gallery space, however the future may provide opportunities to explore alternative install methods for these two pieces.

The remaining pieces on the walls and hanging from the ceiling were placed to create a cyclical play of visual references between the works. The colour, shape, form, material and concept of each work echoes and converses with the next, contributing to the presentation and questioning of material signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality.

While earlier image-based works, such as the Sticker Series and Liquid Bodies, resulted in factual representation of bodies and objects interacting, the sculptures produced for Divulge are more speculative. Photographs can maintain their realist ‘truthful’ associations (even today when modern technology enables ease of image editing), yet the abstract nature of sculpture enables the audience further agency in interpreting works. Divulge
made clear to me that sculpture was an ideal medium for investigating and transforming material signifiers of female sexuality.

Melbourne based (English born) artist Claire Lambe similarly utilises the “tactile and transformative possibilities of sculpture to unsettle conventional notions of gender and sexuality” (National Gallery of Victoria 2013). However, while Lambe draws on her experiences of the experimental art and music scene of 1970s Northern England (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Now, Claire Lambe 2014), my own works explore the way I experience sexuality and female bodies being seen and understood today. Although informed by my personal experience, I have endeavoured to demonstrate the complications of female sexual/ised subjectivity, emphasising its multiplicity and contradiction rather than a singular narrative. Yet I have been motivated and inspired by many female artists whose works are informed by a deeply personal lens, including Louise Bourgeois, Kate Just, Frida Kahlo, Hannah Wilke and Tracey Emin (amongst many others).

Tracey Emin’s artworks have been of particular interest, as her own sex life has often been the subject of her work. This has made her work controversial and even polarising for a public who are not used to women expressing their sexual lives and experiences.

Emin’s iconic work *My Bed* (1998) depicts the simple yet provocative environment of a dishevelled bed surrounded by rubbish. The items include alcohol and sex related objects, such as condoms, empty vodka bottles and
contraceptive pill packets. Alongside the stained bed sheets and pillows a narrative of alcohol fuelled sex is constructed, and the more details that are taken in, the more it crescendos to a scene of extremity. Neal Brown describes the piece as implying “compulsivity and obsession in the course of seeking pleasurable relief from pain and fear, with a resulting loss of control that threatens death or a twilight endurance” (2006, p. 102), and Emin herself has referred to it as looking like a “crime scene” (Emin cited in Brown 2006, p. 100).

While the work is clearly provocative, its challenging nature is amplified by the fact that Emin is a high profile female artist working with explicitly female content. Dealing with subject matter that conjures moral judgement including promiscuity, unwanted pregnancy and alcoholism (Brown 2006), Emin leaves herself open to judgment. Brown suggests “The stigma that attaches to Emin for these transgressions is greater for her being a female who has chosen to ignore prohibitions against disreputability” (2006, p. 102).

Perhaps fuelling the provocative nature of the piece, Emin’s physical body is not present, denying us the pleasure of the cultural gaze upon her female body. Instead we are faced with its absence, presented with the less attractive bodily fluids and aids leftover from private acts we will never see.

While I applaud Emin’s use of her experiences in her artworks, I have sought to construct less personal narratives within my own work, where I have been unable to reconcile a single female subjectivity; hence a feeling of paradox is present in the sculptural outcomes.

Ultimately, the work throws into question my own experience and the projection of my female sexual/ised subjectivity, but leaves any personal conclusions undisclosed. Unlike Tracey Emin’s autobiographical confessions of sexual experiences and desires, the sculptures in Divulge contradict the title by doing the opposite. While the works allude to power, sex, desire and mechanisms of the cultural gaze, a personal narrative remains ambiguous.
Instead of divulging personal or singular representations of sexual/ised female subjectivity, *Divulge* offers the possibility of expansion via multiplicity, paradox and play.
CONCLUSION

This research project has explored the multiple experiences and perceptions of female sexual and sexualised subjectivity within and through material investigations that implicate the female body. To explore this, I employed the consuming process of heuristic inquiry, where I used the creative process of making to think through ideas about sexual/ised bodies and materials. My research has included historical research of feminism and feminist theory, clothing and fetish, but also incorporates research and reflection on information that appears to me in my everyday life via social media, film and television, advertising and the music industry. I consider the information gathered from all areas of equal value to the project, as part of a layered and nuanced investigation.

In an ongoing quest to understand my own relationship with representations of female sexuality, I produced a large body of artworks that form the major contribution of this practice-based PhD. These artworks contribute new and unique sculptural forms and performative works to the area of interdisciplinary art practice, also impacting on the areas of contemporary craft, and fashion and textiles. The majority of the completed works have produced significant outcomes in the form of public exhibitions, in addition to being presented at conferences, symposiums and artist talks both locally and overseas.46

The project aimed to expand existing understandings of female sexuality and desire by bringing them into view and embracing their complicated nature. Two key areas of interest were identified as variables that the project would investigate: seductive materials (such as satin or lace), and female bodies framed by the gaze. These core themes of materials and the viewed body have been concurrently investigated throughout the project, with particular focus on the way sexual/ised female subjectivity is influenced by the gaze, and the seductive materials that contribute to the sexualisation and

46 See Curriculum Vitae and Visual Documentation of Research Activities at end of dissertation for a full list of research activities conducted during this PhD.
objectification of female bodies. My initial hunch was that various combinations of these elements were crucial to our understanding of sexualised female stereotypes. I wanted to gain insight into why and how they operate, and what the potential might be for such understanding within my art practice. I wanted to discover the limitations and potentials of materials and the body in constructing new narratives of female sexual/ised subjectivity.

Through research of dress and clothing, I became increasingly aware of the subtle ways in which they can influence the perception of female bodies, and how this is reinforced by popular culture. Through research of specific clothing via the writing of authors such as Valerie Steele, Francette Pacteau and Paola Di Trochhio, I came to understand how transgressively fetish garments have been appropriated into mainstream fashion, propelled by the industries of advertising, music and film. This project has considered not only particular garments (such as the bra) as signifiers of desire, but identifies the provocative agency of materials such as lace and silk. These seductive materials are regularly used to adorn objectified female performers within popular culture. We see this demonstrated repeatedly in film and television, advertising and the music industry. Such sexualised materials have become intrinsically linked to the sexual/ised female body, enabling some materials to act as a substitute for the sexual/ised body itself.

My project not only investigated the use of materials identified as inherently sexualised (such as rubber or satin) but has also engaged with banal materials such as mesh and hot glue. The artworks produced play on our perception of signifiers of desire and examine the boundaries of recognition. This has been achieved through material experiments and forms that interact with the body but are not recognisable as clothing, such as the hot glue wearable sculptures in the Liquid Bodies series. In addition to playing with existing signifiers, the works challenge stereotypical representations of female sexuality by imbuing them with multiple interpretations. For example, the peculiar bra sculptures reference the sexual/ised female body, but can also be read as utilitarian and banal at the same time.
The project at its core has considered a contradiction: can material signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality be appropriated within artworks to expand representations of sexual/ised female subjectivity?

It was important to gain a thorough understanding of how fashion operated historically in the formation and promotion of female sexual archetypes, such as the femme fatale, so that I could analyse the codes and signals involved. This allowed me to play with the prevailing narratives of seduction and to introduce peculiar elements, therefore disrupting the existing signifiers of desire. The creative outcomes play with our perceptions of desire that have been largely influenced by a cultural gaze.

During this PhD, I began to use the term cultural gaze to refer to the way that the male gaze is no longer reserved for men, but is now a cultural lens through which we look at the female body. In other words, women also use the male gaze when looking (at women). The cultural gaze is a particular cultural condition where the female body is continuously framed in a sexual/ised way for visual consumption.47 This gaze causes a continual culture of visual evaluation of women based on appearance. The acceptance of this cultural gaze both offends and intrigues me, and has been one of the main provocations for this research investigation.

Second wave feminism identified the discriminatory nature of the visual focus on women, as Naomi Wolf explains: “the beauty myth is always actually prescribing behaviour and not appearance” (1991 p. 14). And yet, despite the clearly oppressive effects on many women, the subject of the cultural gaze intrigues me as well. I wondered: what is it about sexualised beauty that is so often alluring? Why am I (and so many others) attracted to looking at exaggerated and unrealistic versions of female sexuality? And where does female desire situate within this structure?

47 I acknowledge that the cultural gaze increasingly affects the male body, however historically and currently it is a gaze that is largely focused on female bodies.
These questions have sat uneasily in every project throughout my candidature, however I have come to see that the supposed contradictions within this topic are what make it rich. The project does not align with explicit binaries of any kind. It does not choose from an existing mode of feminism or declare that there is only one path for future feminism. Instead, it highlights the complexities of female desire and of the cultural gaze. It has considered the representations and possible experiences of female sexuality that have been forced into categories even by the waves of feminism—the second wave tried to control it by demonising beauty, along with the women who used it as a way of expressing their sexuality; and the third wave retaliated against these restrictions and embraced female sexual power and the authority to evoke the gaze themselves48.

The creative works aim to connect to these observations of feminist ideals by displaying characteristics of the second wave's attempt to destroy beauty by utilising unusual forms and subtle critique, and juxtaposing this with sexually suggestive materials and forms symbolic of third wave feminism's sexual embrace. By incorporating elements of both, it aligns with neither, instead attempting to forge a new position, one that allows for the multiplicities of female subjectivity to exist.

This PhD project has not aimed to propose an answer or to synthesise the seemingly opposing options for female body politics. Rather it highlights the problem that exclusively subscribing to the ideal of a single female subjectivity or cultural gaze is going to be restrictive and oppressive. I suggest that there is no single female subjectivity to be discovered, but instead a multi-faceted subjectivity capable of changing and altering, a type of oscillating or split subjectivity. This is reflected in the artworks by introducing playful and peculiar narratives that engage with ideas of paradox. Bizarre and conflicting

48 This brief summary of second and third wave feminism should be read within the current context of Western popular culture. It is a generalisation of two of the waves of feminism which are much more complex (and which include many more voices and perspectives), yet these are the points I wish to bring attention to in this closing section as they are key to the stereotypical representations that this project is interested in.
elements were integrated into works such as Slave to create simultaneous confusion and intrigue. This sculpture appears to exist as a mass of lumps, but closer inspection reveals the strange lead and collar attached to it. The purpose of such a peculiar addition is to expand the number of possible readings, enabling the sculpture to be considered absurd and confusing, humorous and intriguing, or politically sexualised and/or provocative. By integrating playful, yet sexually suggestive narratives I was able to subvert traditional signifiers of desire and straddle the boundary of erotic suggestion. Here, absurdity is employed as a device to arouse amusement and displace singular interpretations of the work.

While politically motivated, the creative outcomes reflect an agnostic political position that simultaneously celebrates and critiques stereotypical sexualised female bodies. This is due to my firm belief that there is no single subjectivity that should be highlighted above all others, and that the nature of sexuality is individual and private. I do not wish to choose sides between the ideals of second and third wave feminism, but prefer to take what we have learnt (and are learning) from each, in the hopes of expanding our understanding of female desire, instead of trying to constrain it.

At the commencement of this candidature I found it challenging to instigate and pursue my project, as I felt surrounded by negative implications of associating with the term ‘feminism’. Although many people were in support of gender equality, there was a cultural distancing from the word ‘feminism’ itself, presented in the media and reinforced by many in the public eye. Celebrities such as Geri Halliwell (originally famed for her role in the Spice Girls who celebrated ‘girl power’ in the 1990s) were contributing to this negative image, stating: “For me feminism is bra-burning lesbianism. It’s very unglamorous. . . We need to see a celebration of our femininity and softness” (Halliwell cited in Moorhead 2007).

With feminism attracting such negative coverage, I initially sought to situate
my work amongst the catalogue of feminist artists that had come before me.
In particular, I looked to the pioneers of feminist performance art of the 1960s
and 1970s. The body-based practices of Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke
and Yoko Ono were pivotal to my early understandings of female sexual/ised
subjectivity. But it was difficult to find local and current artists with whom I
could relate my practice. Although some of the stigma remains around the
term,\(^5\) a shift in perception has become evident in more recent media
representation of feminism, as political situations\(^5\) have revealed a strong
need for the movement once again. I hope that my PhD will form a
contribution to this potentially pivotal moment in time.

At the conclusion of my research project I found myself working within a
renewed discussion on feminist issues, both within the arts and the broader
cultural community. The practices of artists such as Hannah Raisin, Adele
Varcoe and Kate Just are examples of the current interest in female
subjectivity, while comedians such as Amy Schumer (USA) are talking about
female sexuality and desire with a candour previously unheard of in public
dialogue. Beyoncé’s recent chart topping album *Lemonade* (2016) focussed
on feminism and race issues, and the film industry has produced strong new
female action heroes, such as the character Katniss Everdeen in the widely
successful *Hunger Games* trilogy. Personally I feel a shift in public
consciousness has taken place during my project that has been reflected in
my personal journey and is demonstrated in the creative outcomes.

But the most profound influence on my practice was realised closer to home
when in early 2015 I founded a feminist collective with four of my research
peers. *Triple F Collective* initially consisted of five female artists each

\(^5\) As recently as 2016, Sarah Jessica Parker (star of the television show *Sex and the City*) declared: “I
am not a feminist” (Parker cited in Fulenwider 2016), although her beliefs clearly align with feminism.
Her explanatory statement: “I believe in women and I believe in equality, but I think there is so much that
needs to be done that I don’t even want to separate it anymore. I’m so tired of separation. I just want
people to be treated equally” (Parker cited in Fulenwider 2016), demonstrates that she is for equality,
but does not want to be associated with the term feminism itself.

\(^5\) Such as Donald Trump becoming President of the United States of America.
originating from different countries, Sofi Basseghi (Iran), Paula van Beek (New Zealand), Yu Fang Chi (Taiwan), Vanessa Godden (North America) and myself, and is now an expanding community. Regularly gathering to discuss and present individual experiences of female subjectivity through diverse cultural lenses, the group has enabled me to engage in focussed dialogue relating to my research.

The formation of this collective was an unexpected but significant outcome of this research, one that is already generating interest and discussion relating to feminist issues, and one that will ultimately continue to contribute to the discourse on feminism after the PhD is complete. Triple F Collective is currently scheduled to present their first group exhibition at Seventh gallery in early 2017, curated around the presentation of cross-cultural perceptions of femininity, feminism and female sexuality.

Fig. 118: Triple F Collective logo.

Throughout this PhD, the central concern of female sexual/ised subjectivity has been investigated by examining both the body as a material, and the potential of materials to suggest bodies.

With the body as a central concern, the initial chapter mapped out the literary influences on the project, providing an overview of the relevant ideas of John Berger, Laura Mulvey, Judith Butler, Naomi Wolf, Simone de Beauvoir and Ariel Levy. Their writing and concepts were explored in further detail throughout the projects as a way of contextualising the creative outcomes within a gendered and feminist framework.
The material signifiers of stereotypical female sexuality were investigated in the second chapter, highlighting the transference of signification from the female body to particular materials via fashion and dress. Examples of this within popular culture (such as Lady Gaga’s Coke can hair rollers) led me to confidently speculate that a broad range of materials could potentially be utilised to substitute (and disrupt) existing signifiers of desire.

The initial case studies clarified my ability to construct sexual/ised narratives using material elements and the devices of the gaze. The materials of fan frames, crepe paper, lipstick and mesh all became sexually suggestive once placed beside a female body framed by the mise en scène of desire. I identified that the visual language I was using was relying on stereotypical images of sexual/ised female bodies, made culturally popular by online selfie culture/soft porn, such as exhibited by the SuicideGirls. The images produced in these case studies demonstrate a sophisticated version of my own internalised male gaze, a feature I wished to challenge and explore.

In *Liquid Bodies* (Project 1), the material experiments of hot glue combined with photography of the glue outcomes on the body, revealed the boundary of sexual narrative as it stepped over into adornment and out of sexual dialogue. While the hot glue itself was visceral and bodily and imbued with the qualities of lace, it did not communicate clearly as a signifier of desire. The effect of desire and sexual narrative was also dulled by the positioning of the works onto clothed bodies rather than on flesh.

To reignite the sexual/ised body, *Embodied* (Project 2) tested three alternative ways of combining the body and materials. First, it brought back the seductive element of visible flesh in the *Sticker Series*, where I worked directly onto the naked body and documented the results of this performative process in photographs. Secondly, I brought my own female body into the gallery space in the performance piece *Body Badges*, allowing me to examine the effect of my physical presence being brought into the work. Through this experience, I was able to engage my physical body in an exchange with participants—a forced interaction where they could literally choose a preferred part of my
body. This work forced the gaze onto my body, but also broke it down and trivialised the visual consumption through the use of text. The badges with the names of body parts produced a metaphorical shield between my actual body and the participant. And while the audience were forced to see my return gaze, they were welcomed into the interaction by me, creating a safe space for looking and touching. Finally, bras were utilised in the Embodied Series of neckpieces, connecting to a feminist narrative via materials rather than the body. These wearable objects expanded stereotypical signifiers into new and unusual forms that elicited multiple interpretations.

As the works became more bodily in their form and texture, the physical body (male or female) became redundant. This pivotal realisation that the actual body was not necessary in the work, allowed me to construct the final series of works as purely sculptural outcomes, and to focus on the potential of materials to evoke bodily presence.

In the final project *Divulge* (Project 3), the creative works expanded off the body and transformed into bodies themselves, thus displaying the power of materials to communicate bodily qualities. Knowledge of the body is evident in the final works, demonstrated by the forms, textures, colours and playful innuendos that allude not only to the body but also to the sexualised female body. Presentation strategies were developed to emphasise this in the final works, such as the use of fetish style straps to suspend Vixen from the ceiling.

Although the notion of clothing is abstracted, the works suggest a potential wearability (bodily affordance) or imply that they have been worn before, thus enabling the viewer to connect to a narrative of dressed and undressed bodies. They operate similarly to Mary Kelly’s work Corpus (1984–85), described by Amelia Jones as work that produces “a stand-in for the body itself in order to explore the effects of subjectivity as well as the social processes that inform it” (1998, p. 29). While Kelly’s pivotal works consisted of photographs of women’s clothing items accompanied by personal text, my final project departs from photography, instead placing value on the physicality of materials and abstract bodily forms within a gallery space.
The body can also be identified in the traces of a performative and embodied making process that included hand sewing, cutting, shaping, folding, and assembling. As the viewer recognises these laborious fabrication methods they are able to consider the now absent body of the artist.

Reflecting my political view that female sexuality is multifaceted and complicated, the works offer multiple ways of being read and understood, while firmly relating to female sexual/ised subjectivity. Throughout the PhD, the works have evolved along with my own personal experiences and understandings of feminist issues, highlighting the fascination and tension I have felt in relation to the cultural gaze and sexual/ised female subjectivity. These complex issues have materialised within my creative works through the use of material signifiers, bodily reference, and strategies that allow for and embrace paradox and play in order to contribute to an ever-expanding dialogue around gender and feminism.
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RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

This practice-based research project has been supported by many opportunities to talk about and test creative ideas and works in public spaces. The following section provides details of my curriculum vitae during my candidature (2011–17), and is followed by a selection of visual documentation from exhibitions and other key events (such as conferences or artist talks).

Curriculum Vitae

SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2017  *Material Bodies and the Complications of Desire*, SITE EIGHT, Melbourne, VIC
2014  *Divulge*, Trocadero Art Space, Footscray, VIC

CURATORIAL PROJECTS
2017  *Identity Intersection*, Counihan Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
2016  *Fashion […]*, Testing Grounds, Melbourne, VIC (co-curated with Tarryn Handcock)
2016  *HOT HOUSE: Danger, Desire, Delight*, Royal Exhibition Buildings, Carlton, VIC (co-curated with Tarryn Handcock)
2015  *Body Site*, Testing Grounds, Melbourne, VIC (co-curated with Tarryn Handcock)
2015  *Emergence*, Royal Exhibition Buildings, Carlton, VIC (co-curated with Tarryn Handcock)
2015  *Peripheral Visions*, RMIT First Site Gallery, Melbourne, VIC (co-curated with Isabel Fuglsang, Kiri Malarski and Nicola Wong)
2013  *(Im)Material Bodies*, 1000 £ Bend, Melbourne VIC (co-curated with Tarryn Handcock)
2011  *Close to Hand*, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Melbourne, VIC

GROUP EXHIBITIONS
2017  *The Lines In Between*, Seventh Gallery, Fitzroy, VIC
2016  *Copy, Cut, Post*, curated by Paula van Beek, Metanoia Theatre at The Mechanics Institute, Brunswick, VIC
2016  *Movements*, curated by Gemma Portelli, Jordan Condor and Lei Lei Kung as part of Virgin Australia, RMIT First Site Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
2015  *Danger: Research in Progress Pop Up Exhibition*, as part of Radiant Pavilion, Kaleide Theatre, RMIT, Melbourne, VIC
2014  *Tools of the Trade*, curated by Justin Jade Morgan and The Wandering Room, Jugglers Art Space, Fortitude Valley, QLD
2014  *Azimuth*, curated by Ruby Aitchison, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
2014  *Embodied*, curated by Suse Scholem, fortyfivedownstairs, Melbourne, VIC
2014  *Design Wrap Challenge*, Presented by The Design Institute of Australia (DIA), First Site Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
2013  *Close to Hand II*, First Site Gallery, Melbourne, VIC
2012-13  *Once More With Love*, curated by Suse Scholem & Simon Cottrell, Studio 20/17, Sydney, NSW (31/07/12 – 18/08/12), Bilk, Canberra, ACT (26/10/12 – 16/11/12), North City 4, Melbourne, VIC (16/02/12 – 02/03/13)
2012  *Pursuit*, curated by Peter Burke, India Art Fair, Delhi, INDIA
2011  *Bend, Stitch, Carve*, curated by Catherine Aldrete-Morris, JamFactory Contemporary Craft & Design, Adelaide, SA
2011  *ManJewellery*, Federation Square, Melbourne, VIC
2011  *Lend me your ears*, curated by Dianne Beevers and part of Loreal Melbourne Fashion Week 2011, Mailbox 141, Melbourne, VIC
2011  *the thrills and pangs of participation / 12 propositions*, curated by Benjamin Lignel, public performances at Bowen Lane, Swanston St and the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, VIC

**GRANTS/AWARDS**
2011–2015  Australian Postgraduate Award. Scholarship to complete PhD within the School of Art at RMIT
2014  RMIT Link Arts funding for solo exhibition at Trocadero Art Space
2014  RMIT School of Graduate Research funding to *run Research Exchange* with Renee Ugazio
2013  RMIT School of Graduate Research funding to *run Research Exchange* with Renee Ugazio
2013  RMIT School of Art funding to present at international conference
2013  RMIT School of Art, HDR Candidate Research Fund to present at international conference

**SELECTED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EXPERIENCE**
2015–  **Founding member of Triple F Collective**, a feminist collective of multi-national, multi-disciplinary artists
2013–  **Casual Academic**, School of Art, and School of Fashion and Textiles, RMIT, Melbourne, VIC
2008–  **Sessional tutor**, Centre for Adult Education, Melbourne, VIC
2013–2016  **Co-director of the Research Exchange**, facilitating regular peer-to-peer presentations from RMIT research students and encouraging inter-disciplinary dialogue between art and design specific schools, RMIT, VIC
2015  **RMIT School of Art Research Committee Member**, VIC
2014  **PhD Representative**, RMIT Research Committee, RMIT, VIC
2014  **President of MAKE** (RMIT Object based Practice student union group), RMIT, VIC
2013  **Vice-President of MAKE** (RMIT Object based Practice student union group)
PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

2015 – **Centre for Art, Transformation and Society (CAST)**, RMIT School of Art Centre for research

2015 – **Triple F Collective**, a feminist collective of multi-national, multi-disciplinary artists

2013 – **MAKE**, RMIT Object based Practice student union group

2010–2015 **Part B**, a research jewellery group based in Melbourne, AUS

CONFERENCE / SYMPOSIAUS

2015 **Speaker** at *Social Response: A Dialogue Around Art and Social Engagement* on the panel *Transformations: responding to questions of art and community engagement*, RMIT Design Hub, Melbourne, VIC

2015 **Speaker** at *Danger: Research in Progress* symposium at Kaleide Theatre, RMIT, as part of Radiant Pavilion Melbourne, VIC

2014 **Chair of panel discussions** at *Transformations: Art and the City* Symposium, RMIT Design Hub, VIC

2013 **Workshop co-facilitator**, *(Im)Material Bodies*, RMIT Design Hub, Melbourne, VIC

2013 **Speaker and participant** at the conference *New Materialisms IV: Movement, Aesthetics, Ontology*, University of Turku, FINLAND

2012 **Guest speaker and panel member** at *Pathways to PhD’s and Masters by Research* at RMIT, VIC

WORKSHOP PARTICIPATION

2014 **Workshop participant**, *Transgressive Teaching: Feminism in the Art + Art History Class*, The University of Sydney, NSW, 29 March

2011 **Technical Assistant and Participant** for Benjamin Lignel’s Masterclass, *I ___ workshops! (or: the thrills and pangs of participation)* at RMIT, VIC
Fig. 119: (top) Invitation for *Material Bodies and the Complications of Desire* (PhD solo Exhibition), shown at SITE EIGHT in Melbourne, Victoria, 24 March 2017; (bottom) Installation documentation.
Fig. 120: Installation documentation of *Material Bodies and the Complications of Desire* (PhD solo exhibition), shown at SITE EIGHT in Melbourne, Victoria, 24 March 2017.
Fig. 121: (top) Invitation for Identity Intersection (Triple F collective group exhibition, which I both curated and exhibited in), shown at Counihan Gallery in Brunswick, Victoria, 2-25 June 2017. (bottom) Installation documentation of my piece Lady V during the opening.
Fig. 122: (top left) Invitation for Crossing the Line (Triple F collective group exhibition), shown at Seventh Gallery in Fitzroy, Victoria, May 2017. (top right and bottom) Installation documentation.
Fig. 123: (top left and right) Publicity booklet for Metanoia Theatre 2016 Season, featuring the exhibition *Copy, Cut, Post* (group exhibition), curated by Paula van Beek, Metanoia Theatre at The Mechanics Institute in Brunswick, VIC, 25 June-10 July 2016; (bottom left and right) Installation documentation and detail of my piece *Raw*, 2016, self-portrait printed fabric.
Fig. 124: (left) Invitation for *Movements*, (group exhibition) curated by Gemma Portelli, Jordan Condor and Lei Lei Kung as part of Virgin Australia, RMIT First Site Gallery in Melbourne, VIC, 24 Feb-11 March 2016; (right) Installation documentation of my piece *Vixen*.

Fig. 125: (left) Invitation for *Danger: Research in Progress Pop Up Exhibition* (MAKE collective symposium and group exhibition) as part of Radiant Pavilion, Kaleide Theatre at RMIT in Melbourne, VIC, 5 Sept 2015; (right) Installation documentation of my piece, *Slave*. 
Fig. 126: (top and bottom) Invitation to *Divulge* (solo exhibition) at Trocadero Art Space in Footscray, VIC, 5-22 Nov 2014.
Fig. 127: Invitation for *Tools of the Trade* (group exhibition), curated by Justin Jade Morgan and The Wandering Room at Jugglers Art Space in Fortitude Valley, QLD, 17-19 Oct 2014.

Fig. 128: Invitation for *Design Wrap Challenge* (group exhibition), presented by The Design Institute of Australia (DIA), First Site Gallery in Melbourne, VIC, 26 Mar-4 Apr 2014.
Fig. 129: (top left) Invitation for Azimuth (MAKE collective group exhibition) curated by Ruby Aitchison, RMIT School of Art Gallery in Melbourne VIC, 12-21Nov 2014; (top right) catalogue page; (bottom left) Press release for Azimuth (MAKE collective group exhibition) curated by Ruby Aitchison, RMIT School of Art Gallery in Melbourne, VIC; (bottom right) Installation documentation of my piece Madame V.
Fig. 130: (top left) Invitation for *Embodied* (group exhibition) curated by Suse Scholem, fortyfivedownstairs in Melbourne, VIC, 28 Jan-8 Feb 2014; (top right) Installation documentation; (bottom) Pages from the catalogue for *Embodied*. 
Fig. 131: (left) Poster invitation for the symposium *The Social Response: A Dialogue Around Art and Social Engagement*, where I was speaker on the panel *Transformations: responding to questions of art and community engagement*, RMIT Design Hub in Melbourne, VIC, 5 Aug 2015; (right) Poster invitation for *Transformations: Art and the City Symposium*, where I was chair of the PhD panel discussions at RMIT Design Hub in Melbourne, VIC, 28 May 2014.

Fig. 132: (left) Poster invitation for *((Im)Material Bodies*, which I was workshop co-facilitator for at RMIT Design Hub in Melbourne, VIC, 19 Sept 2013; (right) documentation of the workshop in action.
MATERIAL BODIED AND THE COMPLICATIONS OF DESIRE

When we think about a definition of desire, our perception often defaults to stereotypes of gender roles and fetish signifiers such as satin or leather. These material and gender based assumptions are re-enforced by the representation of desire in popular culture, such as in television and film. My investigation seeks instead to examine the various tensions and contradictions of desire (its complications) in conjunction with a philosophical interest in the somatic body as material itself. Through practice-based research I question the sexual coding of materials in an attempt to discover the ways in which the relationships between materials and the body can initiate an engagement with and understanding of desire.

My project explores the conditions and boundaries of materials in terms of their materiality, as well as their communication of coded information. At what point is a material no longer recognisable from its point of origin? Can the transformation of materials alter our perception and understanding of desire, or confuse or provoke it?

I will examine the notion of a Material Body through examples of my sculptural works (that suggest body or act bodily) and also performative works which consider the physical aesthetics of the flesh and its representation. By analysing the intimate relationship between materials (or artefacts) and the body, my project seeks to extend thinking around contemporary investigations of the body, materials, gender, sexuality, feminism and film theory.
Fig. 134: (left) Invitation for Close to Hand II, (MAKE collective group exhibition) First Site Gallery in Melbourne, VIC, 6-16 Aug 2013; (right) Media release.

Fig. 135: (left) Invitation for Once More With Love (group exhibition), curated by Suse Scholem & Simon Cottrell, Studio 20/17 in Sydney, NSW (31/07/12–18/08/12), Bilk in Canberra, ACT (26/10/12–16/11/12), North City 4 in Melbourne, VIC (16/02/12–02/03/13); (right) my piece Welded Pendant, 2012, wooden beads, deconstructed peace sign, red cord, hot glue, nail polish, pendant 5 x 5 cm.
Fig. 136: (top left) Invitation for *Pursuit*, curated by Peter Burke, India Art Fair in Delhi, INDIA, 2012; (right and bottom) My series *Signifiers*, 2012, print on canvas, approx. 5 x 5 cm.

Fig. 137: (above) Signage for *Bend, Stitch, Carve* (group exhibition) curated by Catherine Aldrete-Morris, JamFactory Contemporary Craft & Design in Adelaide, SA, 2011; (right) my series of wearable jewellery for the exhibition.
**Fig. 138:** Invitations for *Lend me your ears*, 2011, curated by Dianne Beevers and part of Loreal Melbourne Fashion Week 2011 at Mailbox 141 in Melbourne, VIC.

**Fig. 139:** (left) Online poster for *ManJewellery (Part B collective group exhibition)* at Federation Square in Melbourne, VIC, 2011; (right) my work for *ManJewellery* on a model.
Fig. 140: Invitation for *the thrills and pangs of participation / 12 propositions* (pop up group exhibition of performative happenings) curated by Benjamin Lignel, public performances at Bowen Lane, Swanston St and the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, VIC, 2 Sept 2011.