

**Visualisation of the Imaginary Feminine Body:  
From Liquid to Solid Sculptures**

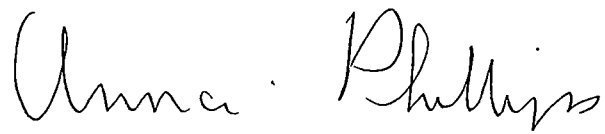
by

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Submitted in the fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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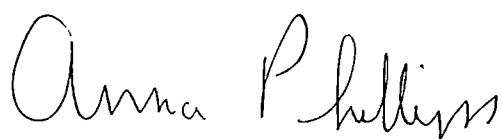
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## Abstract

This research was initiated seeking alternative representations for existing and conventional depictions of women in western art history and popular culture. The visual work is founded on the manipulation of oppositional liquid substances, shampoo and used bath water, to form a new material, an imaginary substance. This synthetic and organic combination can be altered from a liquid to a solid state, behaving in a similar manner to an alchemical unguent, that is, a constructed emollient able to dissolve its appropriated properties through the layers, both physical and imaginary that surround the feminine body.

Within this mix of opposites, exist the signified properties and societal values of the original sources. Its transformable materiality refers to an absent feminine body and, most importantly, to its surface, mass and odour. The sculptural pieces acknowledge the relevance and domination of patriarchal constructs that are employed towards these dominant signifiers of feminine representation. Within the developed forms the properties of these constructs are addressed and re-employed to create a type of self-portraiture and the suggestion of lived bodily experience.

This developed substance is capable of performing as an aesthetic metaphor for the layers, folds and invaginations of real skin. The created sculptures visualise the surface and form of the hidden interior and the outer visible layers that surround the feminine body.

The writer Rebecca Solnit in her essay,<sup>1</sup> suggested that one looks in the places between desirable and disgusting if interested in seeking a new feminine aesthetic based upon the unimproved female body. Visualisation of an Imaginary Body generates a range of interpretations and possibilities. Indeed, the discovery of this mid-zone offers an alternative that relies on a much broader range of sensations than is currently acknowledged or given importance.

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<sup>1</sup> Solnit, R. 'The View from Mt. Venus – on the Aesthetic of the Exquisite', *Art Issues*, Summer, 1997, pp. 22-26.



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and Ernie Beaux for creating it.

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and my dog Bobbie for taking me for walks.

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### Introduction

#### Identifying the Project

Throughout western art history feminine representation has not been favourable to women. Over the last thousand years or so, most art has been made by men, for men. Any attempts to explore feminine experience have only surfaced, or been promoted in, the last fifty years with the ground-breaking practice of women artists such as Louise Bourgeois<sup>2</sup> and Eva Hesse.<sup>3</sup> In popular culture, feminine representation seems to have fared little better. Women are largely presented as commodities to be seen and to be consumed.

I was no longer interested in seeing, or experiencing, two-dimensional renderings of women's amputated body parts. Neither was it exciting to read about masculine interpretations of what it means to be female.

I was led by strong feelings to investigate women artists who were making unique and intimate art works related to their own lives. Surely a more 'real' interpretation of being female did exist.

It seemed important to locate artists who were working with materials that could evoke, or be imbued with, a type of emotional content, that allowed a more intimate range of characteristics, or personifications to be realised.



Fig. 1  
*Decore* Princess insignia on 1950s shampoo packaging.

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<sup>2</sup> Louise Bourgeois b. Paris (1911).

<sup>3</sup> Hesse, Eva. b. Germany (1936-1970).

## Introduction

Attracted to women artists who worked with transformative every-day domestic substances with themselves as both subject and object of their art making, I sought to ignore, or at least reverse, the idea of woman as passive object and stereotype. The writer, Rebecca Solnit provided the first clue in my search for a sculptural alternative. She challenged her readers to look no further than the mid-zone,<sup>4</sup> the spot where the desirable and the repulsive meet, if they were interested in finding a new feminine aesthetic.

In chapter one contemporary feminist thought concerning women's representation in western art and popular culture is outlined. I will include here Foucault's concept of the Docile Body, which he describes as the body conditioned into passivity by the enforcement of limiting behaviours and disciplines. Specific constructs that operate and manipulate feminine bodies will be discussed.

Consideration is given to the body substances of hair and skin in relation to feminine identity and gender relationships. An examination is made of the links between odour and femininity, and why body odour is considered offensive. The relevance of the perfumed woman in popular culture is also mentioned. I then discuss shampoo and its transformative possibilities, and the role it plays in constructing and upholding images of acceptable femininity in popular culture.

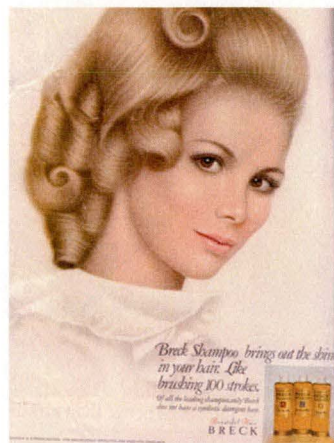


Fig. 2  
Breck shampoo magazine advertisement, 1970s.

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<sup>4</sup> Solnit, R. (1997) 'The View from Mt. Venus – on the Aesthetic of the Exquisite', *Art Issues*, Summer, pp. 22-26.

## Introduction

I introduce an alternative model of artistic representation, which utilises both psychoanalytical and feminist perspectives, and one that seeks to visualize what Elizabeth Grosz termed, the Imaginary Body.<sup>5</sup> I refer to female artists whose work has informed my own during the three phases of the project. It was not easy finding artists who have used self-representation in their work. After much consideration, I chose to concentrate on the art practice of Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Lynda Benglis, Anne Hamilton, Hannah Wilke, Patricia Piccinini and Clare Ursitti.

Then follows a description of the way in which this project was pursued, including the sculptural work created in response to my practical research and theoretical findings.

The conclusion to the paper remarks on major research findings and the overall success of the project; its relevance for, and context within, the existing corpus of visual art works that relate to this topic.



Fig. 3  
1940s shampoo advertisement featuring English starlet, Margaret Lockwood.

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<sup>5</sup> Grosz, E. (1985) Part 2, 'The Inside Out' in *Volatile Bodies—towards a Corporeal Feminism*, (St. Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin) p. 62.

## **Introduction**

### **Central Argument**

The project is pursued with the aim of developing a sculptural visualization and intimate representation of the imaginary feminine body.

The significance of this project is that it adds to an ongoing dialogue in visual art practice and examines some of the major constructs and disciplines that dictate acceptable feminine representation in a patriarchal culture.

Imaginative solutions are developed; such as combined liquid shampoo and the waste by-products contained in used bath water. This pooled mix embodies the transgressive and transformative possibilities of the project. A deliberate bypassing of the intended functions of the substances and alteration of their materiality and form is pursued. This shift creates a subversion of their original importance and meaning as suggested by the manufacturer.

Manipulation of these transformational fluids creates a substance whose existence acts metaphorically as layers of the skin, locating the skin, its borders and orifices, as important sites in the construction of the feminine and its representation in consumer culture.

The outcome of this research is a gallery presentation of visual forms whose structures provide viewers with a type of self-portraiture, allowing an opportunity to engage in an intimate experience of lived feminine space. These works are submitted for examination along with a written Exegesis that will address the visual work. Together these form the submitted Thesis.



## Introduction

### Background

This project grew out of my Masters Research Degree, 'Shampoo Mythology – its objects, its meaning and its influences'.<sup>6</sup> I investigated the construction and mystique of this mythology in relation to feminine representation in popular culture. (See Appendix A for an account of my research findings). I discovered that shampoo bottles are sexed objects, they are coded according to feminine 'types', and their marketing and presentation is specifically aimed towards stereotypical representations of women and feminine experiences. These highly successful marketing strategies have very little to do with promoting clean hair on the fine, dry or oily scalp; rather, shampoo is marketed specifically towards certain age, race and gender groups, mostly youthful and energetic, female and available, and Anglo-Saxon. The variations in shampoo packaging and presentation include bottles that signified the virtuous woman and that of her opposite, the femme fatale. Other types of shampoo bottles in this taxonomy suggest supernatural ingredient associations or a quasi-scientific leaning in their presentation and imagery. The outcome of this research was a body of visual works based on my invented typology that was submitted for my Masters Degree in 1999.



Fig. 4

*Salon Selective* shampoo bottle, 1995.



Fig. 5

*Pantene* shampoo bottle, 1995.

Examples of Virtuous bottles from my invented shampoo Taxonomy.

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<sup>6</sup> Completed Masters Research Degree, 'Shampoo Mythology – its objects, its meaning and its influences' in 1999, Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania, Hobart.



## Introduction

During the last stages of my MFA, I began to experiment with visual forms made up of solidified shampoo and I read Rebecca Solnit's illuminating essay on feminine aesthetics. Solnit, a contemporary American historian and art commentator, addresses the issue of feminine representation and the body in many of her writings. She argues that most representations of the feminine in western art and the contemporary media portray women as either virtuous virgins or fallen females. She advises her readers that if they wish to find a more 'true' and realistic definition of the feminine, then they should move beyond the predictable and conforming models. To achieve this endeavour, she offers the clue that we should look no further than the 'mid-zone,'<sup>7</sup> or what is considered the mid-point between desirable and disgusting; the place where the repulsive and the beautiful intersect.

Curiosity aroused, my attention was then focused on finding a way to Solnit's 'mid-point', this place that is illustrative of a new feminine aesthetic. When nearly all representations of the female body throughout recorded western art history have been measured up within a narrow binary and, basically, only display two categories, the virtuous and the fallen, how do we find the 'mid-point'?

The first significant work that I made at this time, a 500mm square slab of solidified used bath water with a layer of coconut conditioner coating the surface. The title, *my michelles*, derives from the scientific description of the result of surfactant fluid (see appendix B) coming into contact with grease droplets suspended on hair follicles. At this moment of suspended froth, these sudsy particles are referred to as michelles.

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<sup>7</sup> Solnit, R. (1997) The essay 'The View from Mt. Venus - on the Aesthetic of the Exquisite' was edited and included in Solnit's (2001) text, *As Eve said to the Serpent: On Landscape, Gender and Art*, (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press) pp. 205-218.

## Introduction



Fig. 6  
Anna Phillips  
*my michelles*, 1999.  
100mm(h) x 500mm(w) x 500mm(d).

I decided to collect my own michelles from my daily ablutions.

The piece looked like a creamy slice of milky confectionary, smelling deliciously of coconut ice and half-forgotten olfactory memories of warm skin slathered in liquid brown sun tan oil. I had to hand-deliver *my michelles* to a gallery as soon as it was made. It was all wobbly and dewy with moisture and getting to the gallery became quite an event. Whilst carrying the slab up two flights of stairs. I attempted to hold the piece everywhere and, while trying to avoid damaging its translucent gelatinous sides, I observed what looked like pearls of sweat appearing on its upper surface, as well as on my own forehead.

I could make out skin-like irregularities and an uneven fleshy texture on its surface. Our consumer culture is obsessed with blemish-free skin, and yet skin is the one external organ that reflects our inner being. Our life experiences are mirrored in our time-worn skin. Writer, Susan Brownmiller in her 1984 text, *Femininity*, discusses the interesting relationship between beautiful skin and social categorisation. She looks at how pale beauty and white shoulders are more than just a matter of health and cleanliness – they are a matter of social communication.

White pale skin is a sentimental attribute of virginal innocence and aristocratic fragility, historically defined by that complex mixture of exaggerated anatomical difference, evidence of a sheltered life and of male sexual preference for a serene young female in mint condition.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Brownmiller, S. (1984) *Femininity*, (New York: Simon & Schuster) p. 53-73.

## Introduction

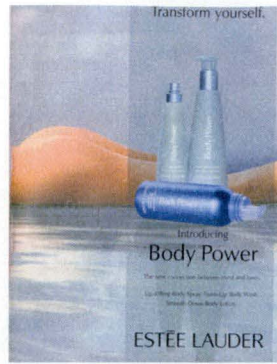


Fig. 7

*Estee Lauder* magazine advertisement, *Transform yourself*, 2002.

After a few days I anxiously observed that the ‘morning fresh’ moistness of the sculpture was being replaced by a much drier yellowing surface. It seemed to be mirroring real aging skin by becoming stretched, blemished and wrinkly. Its odour was also changing from flowery fresh to a flatter and staler smell. But it was the ambiguous response from viewers to the work that caused much optimism. With Solnit’s 1997 views advocating a feminine aesthetic freshly in my mind, I felt that with my latest work I had arrived at some kind of unsettling mid-point. The slab was made from 25 litres of used bath-water and was very heavy. It looked appealing yet shocking and disgusting at the same time. The slab looked like flesh or, rather, like a cross-section of something visceral, with two distinct layers, one of surface and the other a type of translucent substructure. When viewers realised the ingredient list was composed of both desirable and disgusting fluids, most experienced a sense of shock that something that looked inviting and smelled so sweetly could have been evolved from something considered repulsive.

Keeping to Solnit’s suggestion of looking in the mid-zone,

I intended to make forms that would suggest such an imagined place. I wanted to disentangle the contrasting composite elements of the chosen fluids and to create an imaginary substance that contains a mix of solidified liquid substances embodying western cultural ideals and to combine this with its oppositional by-product, collected waste from the personal ‘stuff’ of my own lived bodily experience – shampoo and bath water. I felt buoyed that somebody else (Solnit) had taken issue with what I also perceived as the predictable range of feminine representation in art history and popular culture.

## Introduction

Solnit captivated me with her challenging ideas on feminine representation.<sup>9</sup> Armed with her directions, and despite uncertainty as to its likely location, I felt compelled to find this uncomfortable and rather unpleasant sounding place, testing its alleged existence and importance.

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<sup>9</sup> Solnit, R, (2001) *As Eve said to the Serpent: on Landscape, Gender and Art*, (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press) pp. 205-18.



## Chapter 1 Related theoretical ideas

Solnit names the 'mid-point', between desirable and disgusting, the Exquisite, because it is illustrative of the 'point that describes pain, delicacy and a biting loveliness'. She describes this aesthetic as one that originates from the inside, and one that delights in the unimproved, conscious female body; an aesthetic that gives account of being embodied in the form, and one that 'closes the disparity between experience and representation, the suppressed and the over- emphasised'. Solnit explains 'the Exquisite revels in the transgressible boundaries of the female, the location of risky margins, and the places where the biological body affirms itself against prior artistic norms'.

As Solnit describes it, the Exquisite 'restores to the representation of the body everything classical marble removes: the squishy, mobile, mutable stuff of bodies in process and the traffic of appetites through them'.<sup>10</sup>

The theories and writings of the late French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu, and the feminist writer, Elizabeth Grosz, assisted me in the development of the visual forms for my sculptures. Anzieu suggests that an Imaginary Body surrounds the boundaries of the real body. In his 1978 text, *The Skin Ego*,<sup>11</sup> abstract configurations, based on the folds and invaginations of the skin, act to protect and filter sensory experiences in and out of the body. He believes forms correspond to the visual appearance of the cap, the pocket, the sieve and the screen.



Fig. 8  
*Deliciously Sheer* magazine advertisement for Clinique lipsticks.

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<sup>10</sup> Solnit, R. (1997) 'The View from Mt. Venus - on the Aesthetic of the Exquisite', *Art Issues*, Summer, pp. 22-26.

<sup>11</sup> Anzieu, D. (1989) Ch. 1. 'Epistemological Preliminaries' in *The Skin Ego*, trans, C. Turner. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press) pp. 1-20.

## Chapter 1 Related theoretical ideas

These psychically envisioned structures, Anzieu wrote, allow a visualisation of boundaries as well as the interior membranous layers of the Imaginary Body. As he explains, the moment of experiencing sensation is a double sensory encounter peculiar to the skin. That is, we experience feelings both endogenously and exogenously (from the inside and the outside simultaneously). This double sensation is both passive and active. The skin is the only sensory organ that accommodates this experience.<sup>12</sup>

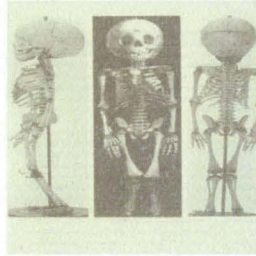


Fig. 9  
X-ray of Caroline Crachami, England's tiniest woman.

In his writings, Anzieu states that these psychical skins exist in our imagination as they surround the physical body providing distinct libidinal feelings of self-worth and individual identity. The materiality and physicality of the skins refer to the presence of the absent body and, as well, they are imbued with memory and lived experiences that are culturally and socially ascribed with signification. Our imagination accommodates a visualisation of these imaginary spaces and their interaction with the world. He describes this Imaginary Body as a visualisation of the inside turned outside.

Elizabeth Grosz also supports the notion of an alternative model for representing the feminine body. In a 1995 essay, Grosz suggests that contemporary attitudes towards the body are directly linked to the ideas of the Greek philosopher Plato and his teachings on mind/body separation. She suggests that instead of looking from the outside only, and responding to superficial cues of surface and exteriority, it should be possible to deny the usual arguments of separate mind/body states and to see beyond these traditional limiting restrictions. She believes that it is possible to utilise Psychoanalytical Theory, to offer an alternative route by suggesting that the

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<sup>12</sup> Anzieu, D. (1990) Interview 4 – 'The Body' in *A Skin for Thought – interviews with Gilbert Tarrab*, (London, New York: Karnac Books) p.75.

## Chapter 1 Related theoretical ideas

body could 'be turned inside out and outside in'.<sup>13</sup> She suggests also that we see the body as one that extends beyond the physical boundaries of the existing one.

Grosz goes on to say that the concept of a body image is not new.

In Ancient Egypt, the word *ka* was used to indicate a less dense, ethereal copy of the physical human body. This invisible copy was considered to be the trace of a living being's soul.<sup>14</sup>

Grosz believes that this new body could now be referred to as the Imaginary Body, a corporeal projection or fragment of the libidinal ego and its sexual energy. This new body, which is really a type of mapping of the psychical body skin, could now refer to depth and interiority, as well as surface.

To illustrate this Imaginary Body, and give an explanation for my belief in its existence, I will briefly digress to an early nursing experience, which happened nearly twenty years ago, and one that I have never forgotten. (See Appendix A for full account) Following the death of a patient I had nursed for some time, I saw the imprint left in the sheets by the absent body and was overwhelmed by the sense of his presence.

I chose to retell this incident, not only to impress upon the reader my strong belief in the presence of the Imaginary Body, but also to admit to a fascination with objects and substances that are capable of transgressive shifts in their materiality and form; at the same time, offering themselves as a sensory language for the absent body. The clearly demonstrated phenomena of the 'phantom limb',<sup>15</sup> is another useful analogy to facilitate understanding the notion of the Imaginary Body.

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<sup>13</sup> Grosz, E. (1995) Ch.12. 'Psychoanalysis and the Imaginary Body', in *Feminist subjects, multi-media cultural methodologies* (ed). P. Florence & D. Reynolds, (Manchester: Manchester University Press) pp. 184-187.

<sup>14</sup> Grosz, E. (1995) *Volatile Bodies: towards a Corporeal Feminism*, (St. Leonards, New South Wales : Allen & Unwin) p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> Phantom limb is a psychological term used to describe the sense amputees have of a still present, vulnerable and pain-prone limb.



## Chapter 1 Related theoretical ideas



Fig. 10  
Sunsilk advertisement, 1990s.

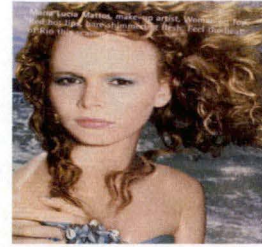


Fig. 11  
Shampoo advertisement, 1990s.

The patriarchal ideologies that dictate the representations of women in popular culture also determine the narrow definition of women's representations in art history. In the last couple of decades, there have been many well-researched responses in both these areas to the vexed questions relating to women's images. In accepted and constructed western art history, women are ignored or relegated to the role of passive observer, or desirable object. Throughout patriarchal history, women have been objectified and packaged for consumption; the underlying intention being to promote and uphold the male dominated value systems of our culture.

Cultural theorist and writer, Marina Warner in her text *Monuments and Maidens* (1985)<sup>16</sup> discusses how, historically, women's bodies have received iconic and mythological status as a patriarchal ploy to incite nationalistic sentiment, and uphold conservative social values. She lists certain geographic and cultural landmarks, such as the Statue of Liberty, New York, that have become allegorical examples behind the formal assumptions based on female body representation and its symbolism in popular culture.



Fig. 12  
1950s American magazine cover.

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<sup>16</sup> Warner, M. (1985) *Monuments and Maidens - The Allegory of the Female Form*, (New York, London: Weidenfield and Nicolson) pp. 3-17.



## Chapter 1 Related theoretical ideas

In the domestic environment, Betty Friedman points out that as women became more socially isolated and contained within the constructs of the nuclear family, shopping became a means of personal expression. She suggests that advertising cast women as 'expert' in domestic and 'personal matters'.<sup>17</sup> This tactic not only increased retail trade, it also helped redefine and idealise gender roles and representations, (girl, wife, mother) locating women as upholders of traditional values and defining boundaries of acceptable feminine appearance.

Contemporary feminist writer Moira Gatens remarks, in *Imaginary Bodies*,<sup>18</sup> that feminists have made the body a focal point in their campaigns. This discourse includes how the body has been

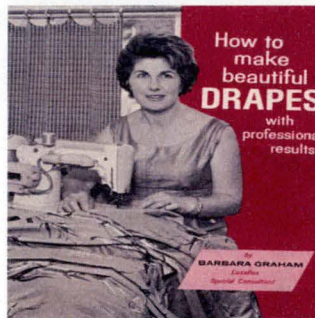


Fig. 13

*How to make beautiful DRAPES*, booklet, 1960s.

constructed by the forces and operations that exist in the society in which we live and, equally, the insistence of the biological body. Western society exaggerates the biological sexual differences (male/female) into gender differences (masculine/feminine), producing ideals and patterns of gender (masculinity/femininity) and of sexual behaviour, appearance and representation. Men, with increased physical strength and physique are coded as being active and independent, whilst women's behaviour and position in society appears to have been determined from a more negative interpretation of the limits and restrictions of their biological functions - out of control, hormonal, emotional and leaking bodies.

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<sup>17</sup> Friedan, B. (1963) *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: Norton) p. 112.

<sup>18</sup> Gatens, M. (1996) *Imaginary Bodies - Ethics, Power and Corporeality*, (London and New York: Routledge) p. 49.

## Chapter 1 Related theoretical ideas

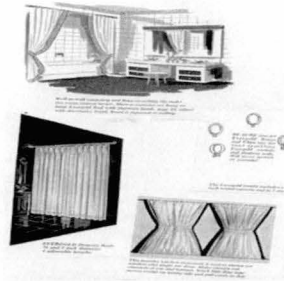


Fig. 14

Curtain Swag patterns, from *How to make beautiful DRAPES*, booklet, 1960s.

Simone de Beauvoir, an early twentieth century exponent of gender studies, describes in *The Second Sex*<sup>19</sup> (1949), how a woman is constructed as man's 'other'; one is not born a woman, one becomes one. To be a woman in western cultures is to be a body constructed from parts; the independent culturally constituted regions of the body that carry particular significance and importance. Susan Stewart puts forward the idea that since we only know our body in parts, the image of what constitutes the self is what constitutes our subjectivity. By a process of projection and introjection of the image, the body comes to have an abstract form by which we know it. It is this body that we project into the outside world in order that its image might return to us.<sup>20</sup> It is the visualisation of this body that interests me.

Lynda Nead in her text *Framing the Feminine*, supports John Berger's remarks on the commodification of women's image, 'through the procedures of art, woman can become culture; seen through the screen, she is framed, she becomes the image, and the wanton matter of the female body and sexuality may be regulated and controlled'. Nead goes on to remark that the principal goal of conventional art images of the female nude has been the containment and regulation of the female sexed body. She believes that these types of depictions have worked metaphorically to 'shore-up the female body - to seal orifices and to prevent matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside body from the outside, the self from the space of the other'.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Beauvoir, S. de (1972) *The Second Sex*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books) pp. 13-30.

<sup>20</sup> Stewart, S. (1993) 'The Imaginary Body - the Grotesque Body' in *On Longing - Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press) pp. 104-131.

<sup>21</sup> Nead, L. (1992) 'Framing the Female Body' in H. Robinson, (ed) *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1969-2000*, (London: Routledge) 2001.

## Chapter 1 Related theoretical ideas

As Susan Bartky, a feminist writer and social commentator remarks, the forces that exert control over women's bodies are, 'every-where and no-where at the same time'.<sup>22</sup> The everyday objects and material substances of our consumer culture have equal influence and importance as agents of social control and in the construction of the feminine, as do more obvious forms of control, such as government laws and legislation.

One such everyday material substance is shampoo; a familiar ubiquitous liquid originally designed to remove grease, this modern substance also provides another function. It has been conscripted as a processed and packaged sensory intermediary offering the 'unspoken gen', which is the tacit link between consumption, desire and feminine identity.



Fig. 15

American Shampoo magazine advertisement, late 1950s.

As the English writer, John Berger discusses in *Ways of Seeing*, the implied viewer, the bearer of the gaze, is male. The eroticised object of the gaze, 'the powerless one', is female.<sup>23</sup> Shampoo advertising gives the appearance of promoting a consumer's sexual empowerment with images of hair-swishing satisfaction. These types of advertisements connect free-flowing or unrestricted hair, which is a signifier of sexual availability and youthfulness, with the product shampoo and with implied narcissistic rewards for the user.

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pp. 564-570.

<sup>22</sup> Bartky, S. (1998) 'Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernisation of Patriarchal Power' in *The Politics of Womens Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance and Behaviour*, R. Weitz (ed) (London: Oxford University Press) pp. 26-45.

<sup>23</sup> Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of Seeing - a book by John Berger and others*, (London: British Broadcasting Corporation) p. 27.



## Chapter 1 Related theoretical ideas

It seemed important to identify the controls and disciplines that exert their authority over women's bodies, and how these controls manifested themselves in relation to women's representations and behaviours. What were these constructs, and how did they come about? I needed to find out why they operate so successfully in our culture, and why they are embraced so universally and opposed by so few.

I decided to examine the work of philosopher Michel Foucault and various feminist theoreticians in order to provide some answers for my questions.

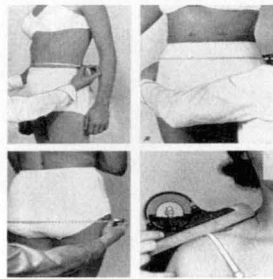


Fig. 16

*Vital statistics of a Citizen*, Martha Rosler, 1977, videotape, 40mins.

In *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (1979) Foucault lists a powerful array of disciplinary practices and policies of coercion – both internalised and external - that are used to produce what he refers to as 'Docile Bodies'. Foucault asserted that people willingly accede to the 'social controls and operations over their being, for a whole range of motivations and reasons, by submitting to its forces that restrict the economy and efficiency of its movements'.<sup>24</sup>



Fig. 17

Diphtheria Inoculations, Children's Clinic, Birkenhead, 1935.

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<sup>24</sup> Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage) p. 138.

## Chapter 1 Related theoretical ideas

Susan Bartky suggests that though Foucault's identification of the 'Docile Body' is enlightening in analysing and deconstructing operational systems of power, his discussion is disappointingly one-sided. She also suggests that he disregards the disciplines and devices that are specific to the controls employed over women's bodies and their re-presentations. In her 1998 essay, Bartky castigates Foucault for his lack of acknowledgment and attention to this fact.<sup>25</sup>

Bartky lists three discourses that exert unique disciplinary controls over women's bodies. They are; those that bring forth from this body a specific limitation to its size and bulk; those that have a specific and limiting repertoire of gestures, postures, and movements; and lastly, disciplines that are directed toward the display of this body as an ornamental surface. It is this third discourse, the skin as inscribed and constructed surface, which has informed my own research and art making.



Fig. 18

Lipstick display Samaritaine Department Store, Paris, France. 2003.

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<sup>25</sup> Bartky, S. (2003) 'Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power' in R. Weisz (ed) *The Politics of Women's Bodies - Sexuality, Appearance, and Behaviour*, (London: Oxford University Press) p. 27.

## Chapter 2 The Elements

Skin seemed an obvious place to site this investigation, because of its dual functions of containing and sealing the body in, as well as constructing a surface, which separates the world from the self.

I aimed to investigate disciplines that have a direct or indirect relationship with the inscribed and decorated surface. I have also included in this investigation, hair, the matter that pierces through this skin surface and which is culturally imbued with iconic significance, mythological properties and sexual power; and body odour, the vapour that exudes through the layers of the skin to the surrounding space. Included is an awareness of the intrinsic value of these substances and the potential they offer when unleashed to subvert and expand definitions and representations of the feminine body and its visibility. I conclude this chapter with an examination of the transformational possibilities of shampoo, a liquid detergent, and its relevance to feminine representation and why it makes an ideal substance for visualising the Imaginary Body.

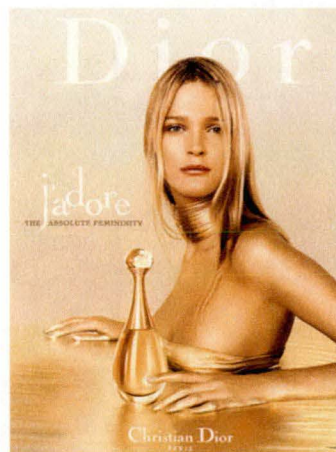


Fig. 19

*J'adore*, Dior magazine advertisement, featuring a golden-skinned woman. 2000.

### Skin

Skin, the complex membrane that holds the body together is, as Ellen Lupton suggests, really a bag with a self-replacing surface with no clear boundaries. It is the biggest system of the body and measures nearly two metres square, if it is ever fully stretched out.<sup>26</sup> As well as providing the visible boundary of appearance, skin, like the body it contains, has been used to manipulate and promote overt social ideologies regarding acceptable femininity.

As a response to this investigation, I became very interested in my own skin. From the outside it looks very much like the skin of a 46 year-old woman, time-worn and marked with long-forgotten scratches and scars. As Ellen Lupton points out, skin is both dead and alive. She quotes Mark Taylor, who made this observation, 'Death, like life is not a momentary event but is an on going process whose traces line the body. At the point where I make contact with the world, I am already dead'..<sup>27</sup> This meeting of life and death also structures our relationship to the world of objects.

The skin performs many vital roles, apart from all its physical functions, it serves as a divider, separating the outside world from the inside. Its outer surfaces are waterproof, and, in essence, remain sealed. However, it does facilitate the passage of substances, including the unknown and the unwanted, through its layers, and, in its breaks and passageways, it provides portals of entry into and out of the body.

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<sup>26</sup> Lupton, E. (2002) *Skin: Substance, Surface + Design*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press) p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> Taylor, M. (1997) *Hiding* quoted in E. Lupton *Skin: Substance, Surface + Design*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press) p. 31.



## Chapter 2 The elements



Fig. 20

Avon advertisement for skin cream, 2003.

My interest in skin arises from a fascination with cleaning it.

As a student nurse I was instructed on how to wash a body, with respect to its nakedness, its perceived 'clean' and 'dirty' areas and an awareness of its transgressive biological insistence and its abject emissions. Susan Bartky summarises western popular culture's view of the attributes of desirable female skin as; 'soft, supple, hairless and smooth'.<sup>28</sup> Ideally it should not betray any sign of wear, experience, age, or deep thought. Mary Douglas, in her fascinating text, *Purity and Danger*,<sup>29</sup> outlines the important relationship between the skin, social order and taboo in western culture, which she suggests, is obsessed with germs and dirt (formlessness) in its relationship to the body. In her informative analysis of the rituals of cleaning and purification that control this threat, she discusses how a dirty body is considered to be dangerously outside the social control of society. Disgust towards society's unwashed, reflects class boundaries and the sense of moral and social superiority, it fosters an unreasonable fear of germs and decomposition amongst most people.

<sup>28</sup> Bartky, S. (1998) 'Foucault, Femininity and the Modernisation of Patriarchal Power' in *The Politics of Women's Bodies-Sexual Appearance and Behaviour* (ed) R. Weitz. (London: Oxford University Press) p. 31.

See Appendix C for a discussion of social attitudes towards feminine skin. pp. 95-96.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas, M. (1966) *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (London: Routledge) p. 120.



## Chapter 2 The elements

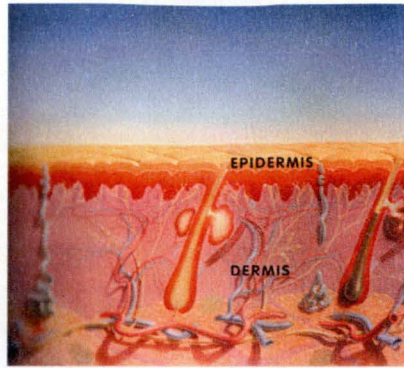


Fig. 21  
Medical illustration, cross-section of skin layers, 1986.

Mary Douglas identifies the breaks and orifices of the skin as suggesting that 'any structure of ideas is dangerous at its margins'.<sup>30</sup> She believes that the orifices of the body symbolise its vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is the most marginal stuff; substances such as blood, milk, urine and tears have traversed the boundaries of the body. Julia Kristeva in her essay on abjection referred to polluting and non-polluting body fluids.<sup>31</sup> She suggested that tears and semen are considered non-polluting or sacred, while others, identified as feminine, such as menstrual blood and sweat (in women) are considered polluting.



Fig. 22  
*L'Oreal* skin cream advertisement, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Douglas, M. (1980) *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of Pollution and Taboo*, (London: Routledge) p. 120.

<sup>31</sup> Kristeva, J. (1982) *Powers of Horror: an essay on Abjection*. Kristeva's comments have been used by I. Tyler in 'Skin tight; Celebrity, Pregnancy and Subjectivity'. The latter is published in S. Ahmed and J. Stacey (eds) *Thinking through the Skin*, (Routledge: London ) pp. 69-82.

## Chapter 2 The elements

Slits and breaks in the skin represent a threat to social order. In the fascinating history of women's undergarments, the slit that used to be a common feature in all women's 'drawers' was done away with after social anxiety concerning the accessibility, or inaccessibility, of female genitalia.<sup>32</sup> An extreme example illustrating nineteenth century morality and social values can be found in Emile Zola's *Nana* (1891) which concludes with the flighty and vain heroine being reduced to a seething purulent corpse, and her skin and flesh become a metaphor for the decadence and decay of French Bourgeois society.

Nana was left alone, her face upturned in the light from the candle. What lay on the pillow was a charnel house, a heap of pus and blood, a shovelful of putrid flesh. The pustules had invaded the whole face, so that one pock touched the next. Withered and sunken, they had taken on the greyish colour of mud, and one of shapeless pulp, in which the features had ceased to be discernible, they already looked like mould from the grave...<sup>33</sup>

Linda Nead warns that all transitional states pose a threat, as well as anything else that resists classification or refuses to belong to a category. Nead, like Solnit, also suggests that it is time to expand the picture of feminine representation and see what is on offer. She recommends finding the hidden places that touch the outside and the place where the outside touches the inside.<sup>34</sup> Protection and containment are the key functions of real and imaginary skin. Skin is the surface on which we can transcribe a record of our life experience; it is the place where memory and the unconscious reside.

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<sup>32</sup> Chenoune, F. (1999) *Hidden Femininity – 20<sup>th</sup> Century Lingerie*, (London: Thames and Hudson) p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> Zola, E. *Nana*, (1972) trans. by G. Holden, (Harmondsworth: Penguin) p. 446.

<sup>34</sup> Nead, L. (1992) 'Framing the Feminine - Body, Sexuality, Image Art, Obscenity and Sexuality' in H. Robinson (ed) *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, (London: Routledge) pp. 564-570.

## Chapter 2 The elements



Fig. 23

French underwear advertisement, early nineteenth century.

Jay Prosser outlines her ideas concerning skin by simply stating that the skin is the body's memory of our life, 'the detailed specificities of life histories'.<sup>35</sup> Not that the skin can be trusted, it may contain the body, and reflect the intimate interior, but it is also burdened with the unconscious, having the ability to record as well as erase experiences. Real skin can be camouflaged, physically altered, stretched or removed altogether. Imaginary skin is also alterable. Our imaginary skin is continuously being subjected to the changing processes of personal imagination and feelings of self worth.

The skin and its boundaries, real and imaginary, seemed an obvious place to commence my search if I wanted to subvert and reclaim these surfaces as authentic and suggest that they could encapsulate lived bodily experience.

<sup>35</sup> Prosser, J. (2001). 'Skin Memories', in *Thinking through the Skin*, S. Ahmed & J. Stacey, (eds) (London: Routledge) pp. 52-68.

## Chapter 2 The elements

### Hair

Languorous, black, luxuriant locks

Live pomander, incense burner

Wafts her wild, musky fragrance

Baudelaire<sup>36</sup>

More has been written about hair than about most other body parts. Popular culture's fascination with and exploitation of hair is extensive. Throughout history, hair has played a vital role in relation to identity and status. It has received prominence in both mythological and other stories, as well as cross-cultural rituals and psychoanalytical explanations for its relevance.



Fig. 24

Shampoo magazine advertisement, 1980s.

Hair is part of the skin, its cells, which as Ellen Lupton point out, 'lie deep within the living dermis, are pushed upwards into shafts of protein, emerging across the body's landscape as a thicket of dead blades'.<sup>37</sup> Hair provides many necessary biological functions, such as protection and warmth,<sup>38</sup> but it also serves other important social and psychological functions. Opposing cultural responses to hair, skin and odour are

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<sup>36</sup> Baudelaire, C. (1890) 'Head of Hair' in *Flowers of Evil, Poems of Baudelaire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

<sup>37</sup> Lupton, E. (2002) *Skin: Surface, Substance + Design*, (New York: Princeton University Press) p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> Lubowe, I. (1961) Ch.2. 'Understanding your hair and scalp' in *New Hope for your Hair - a Scientific guide to healthy hair for Men, Women and Children*, (St. Albans, Hertsfordshire : Frederick Muller) p. 25.

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supposedly linked to subconscious ambiguities related to the body and its emissions. In fact, anything that passes out of, or comes through, the skin layers is considered special. Head hair has specific cultural significance and power; so does a single hair shed from its original source. As Rebecca Solnit remarks 'hair grows continually rather than reaching stasis and thus resembles secretions and perhaps this, as well as its tactility, makes it represent both the taboo and the erotic'..<sup>39</sup>

Cultural theorist Mike Featherstone gives an interesting account on the oppositional qualities of hair which became very illuminating for my understanding of this topic. He lists three criteria that define the relationship of hair to the body.

- a) Head hair and body hairs have opposing signified values for men and women. The length, site and appearance of hair assists patriarchy define the sexuality and acceptability of women in popular culture. Long, unrestrained hair has been used to signify sexual availability, whilst short hair on women has been considered aggressive, with mythological links to punishment and celibacy. Equally men have been judged on the variable length of their hair through different periods in history.

- b) Sites for acceptable hair on men and women are opposed.

Popular culture dictates that hair should be removed not only from the face but also from large surfaces of the feminine body. Exposed body hair is considered taboo. Hairless skin is seen as fashionable and sexually correct. Visible body hair represents a type of threat, a direct confrontation of the masculine conventions of acceptable femininity. Germaine Greer in her (1970) text *The Female Eunuch* remarks that in popular imagination hair is associated with furriness, a marker of bestiality, and as such is an indication of aggressive sexuality.<sup>40</sup> While men are encouraged to allow this side of their manliness to develop, women have to suppress any growth other than on the head. This unwanted hair is even named superfluous. Hair is admired when clean and tossed around on a shining head, but disfiguring when discovered sprouting in an unacceptable area of the body.

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<sup>39</sup> Solnit, R. (1997) 'The View from Mt. Venus - on the Aesthetic of the Exquisite', *Art Issues*, Summer, p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> Greer, G. (1970) *The Female Eunuch*, (London: MacGibbon & Kee) pp 37-38.

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- c) Body hair promotes opposing cultural responses.<sup>41</sup>

Different cultural groups may have opposing attitudes to hair on parts of the body.

Cross culturally, and throughout history, there are many examples of the relevance of hair. J.G. Frazer's text, *The Golden Bough*<sup>42</sup> was invaluable for my investigations for different cultural responses to hair. Also instructive was the seminal research on the magical power and libidinal relevance of hair by E.R Leach<sup>43</sup> Hair is a slender appendage of skin that can suggest a body's presence, even in its absence. Due to its lack of nerve endings, hair is actually dead but, ironically, it is often used to suggest life and fecundity. When hair is shed or cut, the ambiguities and oppositional properties associated with it increase. Hair offers itself as a medium of life and permanence, as well as a substance of parting and loss. As an organic substance, it decomposes slowly. Long after flesh has gone, hair still looks alive.

Hair can be repulsive, but also intimate. Locks of my daughters' hair and their first sharp little baby teeth are examples of my own personal collection of body parts, instilled with special powers and sacredness. On the other hand, the hairs left discarded on empty shampoo bottles initially appalled me. Who did these anonymous offerings belong to? In short, hair and skin provide a language about attachment, preservation and memory as they do about appearance and acceptability.

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<sup>41</sup> Featherstone, M. (1997) 'Hair, Shame and Glory' included in *The Body, Social Processes and Cultural Theory*, M. Featherstone, M. Hepworth & B. Turner, (eds.) (London: Sage) pp. 86-110.

<sup>42</sup> Frazer, J.G. (1976) *The Golden Bough - a Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Macmillan) passim.

<sup>43</sup> Leach, E.R. (1958) *Magical Hair*, Curl Bequest Prize Essay, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* London, 88, 2, pp. 147-64.



### Odour

In response to Bartky's theoretical investigation, I put forward another category that could be included in the list of disciplinary practices resulting in the perpetuation of the woman's Docile Body; this being the control of body odour. Mary Douglas suggests in her 1980 text, *Purity and Danger*,<sup>44</sup> that odour has always been used as an agent of social control over women's bodies throughout patriarchy. Sexual differences dictate the response to, and acceptance of body odour in popular culture. Masculine body odour is considered more acceptable, whilst women are conditioned to find their own body smell disagreeable and the transgression of this dictum results in social rejection. The presence of body odour evokes a negative social response and the stereotypical categorisation of women. And, despite efforts to eradicate this phenomena, individuals have little control over its manufacture or locality. Nevertheless, odour is arguably one of the most undervalued sensory attributes of the body. It holds a marginalised and repressed role in popular culture; but its influence and relevance to the feminine body cannot be overlooked.



Fig. 25  
Odorono advertisement, 1950s.



Fig. 26  
Mum advertisement, 1960s.

Smell is considered a secondary sense. Greek Philosopher Aristotle said smell was not as important as sight, which he considered the more cerebral

<sup>44</sup> Douglas, M, (1980) *Purity and Danger- an Analysis of Pollution and Taboo*, (London: Routledge) p. 120.

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sense. Odour is considered bestial, transgressive, and sensual. Regardless of the limited acceptance of odour in popular culture, smell is one of the fascinating and under-researched body senses. Odour's importance has been very much undervalued in contemporary art even though its presence goes beyond language and image. Odour is said to have invisible powers; it has connections to alchemy, memory and emotions; and it can be manipulated to strongly attract or repel. Classen, Howes and Synnott, the authors of *Aroma*, assert that women are classified in popular culture according to their smell, as either 'foul or fragrant'<sup>45</sup> And, of course, synthetic odours are used extensively in commercial preparations such as shampoo.

Popular culture has a definite rating scale for what it considers desirable and disgusting in odours. Alain Corbin's fascinating volume, *The Foul and the Fragrant – Odour and the French social Imagination*<sup>46</sup> was extremely illuminating regarding the historical path that led to the paradoxical relationship with, and the attitudes held towards, body odour today. Body odours generally can evoke feelings both of total aversion and desire; but female body odour is negatively tied to the processes of the body, menstruation and sexual activity.

Nevertheless body odour is also considered one of the most sexually alluring, individual and insistent virtues of the unwashed body.

Pheromones are the sex hormones excreted from just underneath the skin; and the molecules of pheromones are responsible for creating individual body odour.<sup>47</sup> These volatile substances trigger sexual behavioural responses in humans with glands secreting the most powerful body odours ever produced. They make minute amounts of a milky secretion, which are delivered by a tube into adjacent hair follicles. The hair follicle serves as a wick, which, once stimulated, pumps the odour out till it evaporates. The uncontrollable aspects of these secretions, puts them into the position of being considered abject and disgusting. Control over one's body odours is

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<sup>45</sup> Classen, C, D.Howes, & A. Synnott, (1994) *Aroma: the Cultural History of Smell*, (London: Routledge) p. 162.

<sup>46</sup> Corbin, A. (1986) *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the French social Imagination*, (London : Papermac) p. 27.



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considered desirable in a repressive society, which views leaking body odours with distrust and embarrassment.

A general assumption is that perfume is a form of olfactory camouflage, its function to suppress odours that emanate from the body. However, the latest research suggests that perfume enhances a person's existing odour and sexual attractiveness. Body odour, apparently, sends out important messages that reveal our biological health and fertility.

As part of my investigations I looked at attitudes and perceptions held towards body odours throughout history up to the present day. Most negative attitudes concerning the body have arisen out of strong religious teachings and fears of bodily decomposition. It seems that these attitudes have resulted in a collective distrust of the natural body, and a rejection of bodily processes, including unpredictable leakages and gaseous emissions. In fact, this uncomfortable response is aroused regularly in individuals witnessing the osmotic passage and casual shedding of stuff through their own membranous skin layers resulting in their futile attempts to smother and suppress the passage of these unwanted substances.

Body odour offers up a tantalising conundrum. In western popular culture, women have been conditioned to be offended and disgusted by their own natural smell and, yet, it is exactly these disgusting and recognisable odours that we find attractive and desirable in each other. It would appear that at some point in consciousness, an internal twist must occur, a schism between what we desire and what we find disgusting. Women have been conditioned to suppress or deny their natural selves in the name of society's norms but, subconsciously, are attracted to the things that should supposedly repel them. Half of all perfumes contain base notes, the scent molecules that last longest on the skin and that are related to the human enzyme responsible for colouring and odorising faeces.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The word Pheromones comes from Greek and, means 'to transfer'.

<sup>51</sup> Aftel, M. (2001) *Essence and Alchemy - A Book of Perfume*, (London: Bloomsbury) p. 165.

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Mandy Aftel, perfumer and author of *Essence and Alchemy - a Book of Perfume* <sup>49</sup> retells a charming anecdote about the French Emperor Napoleon who was supposed to have sent word ahead to Josephine on the eve of his return to the French capital. 'I will be arriving in Paris tomorrow evening. Do not wash.'<sup>50</sup>

In my attempts to find a way to 'extract' my own body odour I was much inspired by Patrick Suskind. In *Perfume: the story of a Murderer*, he describes how his protagonist, Grenouille, created his own 'human body odour' perfume.

It was a strange perfume that Grenouille created that day. There had never been a stranger one on earth. It did not smell like a scent, but like a human being who gives off scent... There was a little pile of cat-shit behind the threshold of the door leading to the courtyard, still quite fresh. He took half a teaspoon of it and placed it together with several drops of vinegar and finely ground salt in a mixing bottle. Under the worktable he found a thumbnail-sized piece of cheese, apparently from one of Runel's lunches. It was already quite old, and had begun to decompose, and gave off a biting, pungent odour. From the lid of a sardine tub that had stood at the back of the shop, he scratched off a rancid, fishy something-or-other, mixed it with rotten egg and castoreum, ammonia, nutmeg, horn shavings and singed pork rind, finely ground. To this he added a relatively large amount of civet, mixed these ghastly ingredients with alcohol, let it digest and poured it into a second bottle. On top of this disgusting base, which smelled more like a cadaver than a human being, Grenouille spread a layer of fresh, oily scents; peppermint, lavender, turpentine, lime, eucalyptus, which he then simultaneously disguised and tamed with the pleasant bouquet of fine floral oils – geranium, rose, orange blossom and jasmine. After a second dilution of alcohol and a splash of vinegar there was nothing left of the disgusting basic odour on which the mixture was built. The latent stench lay lost and unnoticeable under the fresh ingredients; the nauseous part, pampered by the scent of flowers, had become almost interesting; and, strangely enough, there was no putrefaction left to smell, not the least. On the contrary, the perfume seemed to exhale the robust, vivacious scent of life.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Aftel, M. (2001) p. 164.

<sup>50</sup> Aftel, M. (2001) p. 165.

<sup>51</sup> Suskind, P. (1985) *Perfume - the story of a Murderer*, trans. from German by J.Woods, (London: Penguin)) p. 155.

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In popular culture the perfumed body is considered desirable, and women are the perfumed sex.<sup>52</sup> However, certain women are not considered fragrant at all. These include virtually any woman who defies established law and order. Thus, the Spanish word for whore, *puta*, along with the French *putain*, whore, and the English, *putrid*, rotten, are all derived from the Latin for *putere*, to stink.<sup>53</sup> According to Max Lake, author of *Scents and Sensuality* women have been habitually valued according to their smell: 'Maidens, innocents and the docile should smell of nothing stronger than the flowers they are associated with'.<sup>54</sup> Femme fatales, sirens who lure men to their deaths, are said to smell of heady, musky and spicy odours, while virgins are said to smell of sweet flowers and milk.

In *Aroma*, Classen, Howes and Synnott discuss myths of perfumed women. They argue that while men are allowed to smell sweaty and unpleasant, women who do not smell sweet are considered traitors to the ideals of femininity and viewed as objects of disgust. Behind the myth of the perfumed woman, women are suspected of being naturally foul and reeking of unpleasant body fluids, such as menstrual blood.<sup>55</sup>

Shampoo consumers are encouraged to connect odour with identity and experience. Lifestyles can be recognized with a whiff of the right fragrance. Floral and fruity odours make up over half of commercial perfumes and are used consistently in shampoo brands. The use of such smells promotes both collective and personal associations.

The synthetic, familiar odours of shampoo are designed to appeal to the olfactory senses, to stimulate desire and evoke pleasant associations. Contemporary advertising promotes shampoo as an exclusive and individualised experience, its odours are deliberately chosen to trigger subconscious olfactory connections, feelings associated with glamour and

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<sup>52</sup> Classen, C., D. Howes & A. Synnott, (1994) *Aroma: the Cultural History of Smell*, (London : Routledge) p. 163.

<sup>56</sup> Lake, M. (1989) *Scents and Sensuality-The Essence of Excitement* (Great Britain: John Murray Publishers) p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> Classen, C. D. Howes & A. Synnott (1994) p. 162.

<sup>55</sup> Classen, C, D. Howes & A. Synnott (1994) p. 164.

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luxury and, also, to release a range of desires for transformed autoerotic bodies and potential experiences.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Martineau. P. (1971) *Motivation in Advertising - motives that make people buy*, (New York : McGraw-Hill Paperbacks) pp. 81-90.

## Chapter 2 The elements

### The transformative substances shampoo and used bath-water

As part of my theoretical investigations, I came across the writings of Alfred Jarry (1873-1907), the 19<sup>th</sup> century French symbolist writer. Jarry had a very short but prolific artistic life. The college of 'Pataphysics' set up in his honour included Duchamp and other notable Dada and Surrealist artists as its members. Jarry referred to the term 'Pataphysics' as the science of imaginary solutions. His unique body of writing informed the recent work of writers Deleuze and Baudrillard. Jarry encouraged a philosophical and conceptual diversion from conventional forms of learning and logical problem solving. He believed that incorporating the symbolic attributes of objects, allowed consciousness to expand into new ways of seeing and experiencing the world.<sup>57</sup>

Though my comprehension of Jarry's writings could be considered superficial, his words gave me courage to believe it was legitimate and permissible to 'make-up' and imagine the unlimited possibilities of my own solutions, and the real possibilities they could present.

With the sculptures I planned to make, I was prepared to ignore the didactic instructions *wet, lather and rinse* that appear on the side of shampoo bottles, and to apply a different set of instructions for its use.

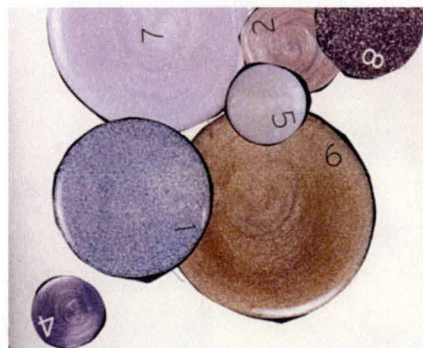


Fig. 27  
Liquid spills in magazine make-up advertisement, 2004.

The promise of contemporary skin and hair-care chemical formulations is that they offer individualised transformational potential and improvement for the female user. A liquid such as shampoo establishes intimate

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<sup>57</sup>Jarry, A. (2001) *The collected works of Alfred Jarry*, Vol. 1. *Adventures in Pataphysics*, A. Brotchie, & P. Edwards, (eds) (London: Atlas Press). *Passim*.<sup>41</sup>



## Chapter 2 The elements

relationships between itself and the user. These substances are designed and engineered to dissolve their chemical parts, and their value-loaded attributes, into the consumers' being through both the imaginary and real layers of the skin. Shampoo's testimonials attest to magical transformations and improvement through the skin layers. Shampooing the hair offers an experience of synaesthesia, as one set of sensory information melts into another, suspending the user in a private watery world of cascading froth and fantasy. Like other commercial beauty products, skin creams, perfumes and deodorant sprays, shampoo is designed to coat over the skin surface, where it then dissolves its molecules. These types of substances also function to suppress or eradicate any natural odour of the user, overpowering their body smell, and replacing it with a feminised synthetic perfume. Shampooing the hair is encouraged; pleasant and recognisable, flowery, fragrant molecules are released during a warm sudsy experience. Physical gestures are ritualised and repeated; consumers willingly comply with the step-by-step instructions, unaware that their behaviour is insidiously promoting and reinforcing the boundaries and limitations of feminine identity and behaviour.

Shampoo was developed from a liquid called Laurel Sulphate, and was originally intended as a detergent.<sup>58</sup> It has been given a unique implied relationship with the body. Its smooth application and mutability provide a slippage between the real and the imaginary feminine body; a synthetic anointment with signified chemicals.



Fig. 28

Avon catalogue, amputated lipsticks, 2003.

Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*<sup>59</sup> short essays on the mythological importance of modern things, looks at the semiotic properties of plastic and detergents.

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<sup>58</sup> When Daphne was fleeing Apollo, Mother Earth changed her into a Laurel (or, in some accounts spirited Daphne away, leaving the Laurel in her place).

<sup>59</sup> Barthes, R. (1972) 'Plastic', included in *Mythologies*, trans. A. Lavers. (London:Jonathan Cape Ltd). pp. 97-99.

## Chapter 2 The elements

In his essay 'Soap Powders and Detergents', he discusses the special qualities of detergents and, by association, we can deduce that shampoo responds similarly to detergents. Through their presentation and marketing, substances such as shampoo shimmer with meaning and associations.

Unlike disinfectants and other chlorinated substances that have a burning action similar to 'liquid fire', (their intention being to 'kill' the dirt) detergents, play a more moderate role as 'separating agents'. The dirt and grease are separated from the skin or cloth layer, driven out by gentle, yet insistent pressure and force. Detergents go in 'deep', accessing private and obscure areas of the body. Unfolding and caressing, their substance involves the user directly in the experience, so that they 'become the accomplice of liberation, rather than the mere beneficiary of its result'.<sup>60</sup>

Bubbles, observed Barthes, signify luxury. Their omission results in user disappointment. Foam may appear to lack any real usefulness, yet its airy proliferating mass signifies a healthy essence; unknown and unpronounceable ingredients are blended into a quasi-scientific/alchemical mix, from which comes an enormous increase of its own volume.

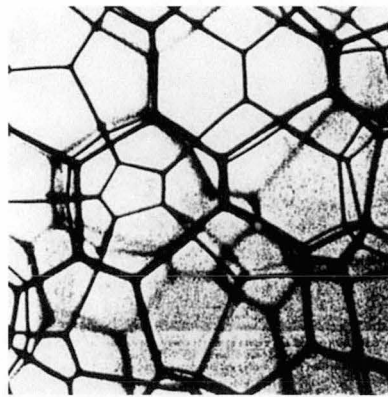


Fig. 29  
Microscopic photograph of detergent bubbles.

Looking specifically at shampoo the potential environmental damage it may cause is quietly ignored or dismissed. Viscous and thickened shampoo liquid is contained in yielding plastic forms whose sleek presentation and feminised imagery drip with seductive appeal and desirability. Beyond any

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<sup>60</sup> Barthes, R. (1972) 'Soap and Detergents' in *Mythologies*, (London : Jonathan Cape) pp. 36-38.

## Chapter 2 The elements

references to hair cleaning ability, these substances present themselves as agents of virtue and purity.

Barthes suggests that materials such as plastic were named for Greek shepherds, Polyethylene, Polyvinyl and Polystyrene. He argues that this technique of apparently referring to the Ancients was a successful device employed in advertising to legitimise the new invention Plastic, which was associated with super-natural qualities of strength and durability.<sup>61</sup>

Shampoo is a contemporary 'sacred' fluid. It is virtuous, wholesome and pure. I believe clever marketing and advertising appropriates secular stories and alchemical myths, such as ones that allude to the rituals of bathing and healing in ancient cultures. Marketing re-invents and transforms the meaning into shampoo bottle imagery, its materiality and its contents. From its chemically loaded composites and its appropriated advertising imagery, shampoo promises to reward the user immediately, or over repeated applications; to diffuse its appropriated importance and significant qualities, through the physical and imagined membranes that envelop the body.

The list of ingredients on the back of a shampoo bottle reads like a modern-day alchemical recipe. Mandy Aftel in *Essence and Alchemy – a Book of Perfume*<sup>62</sup> explains how the philosophy of alchemy expresses the conviction that the spark of divinity – the *quinta essentia* – could be discovered in matter. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was believed that the *quinta essentia* was everything that could be extracted from a living substance. In one sense, shampoo's formulations appear to recapture that spark of divinity – or at least allude to its existence within the shampoo's substance. Shampoo liquid is presented as having balsamic, anointing qualities.

When spray from Aphrodite's hair (her name meaning foam-born<sup>63</sup>) splashed upon the surface of the ocean, the water droplets were said to change into luminous pearls. In other versions it was her tears that became

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<sup>61</sup> Barthes, R. (1972) 'Plastic', in *Mythologies*, (trans. A. Lavers) (London: Penguin) pp. 97-99.

<sup>62</sup> Aftel, M. (2000) *Essence and Alchemy - a Book of Perfume*, (London: Bloomsbury) p. 23.

<sup>63</sup> Rachleff, O. (1990) *The Occult in Art*, (London: Cromwell) p. 32.

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pearls. In our culture, pearls have the dual association of pureness and wickedness, so the inclusion in shampoo bottle presentation is a deliberate tactic to add legitimacy and sacredness - while at the same time adding to the value of the shampoo itself.



Fig. 30  
Close-up of *Birth of Venus*, Sandro Botticelli, 1460.

With these things in mind, I decided to apply this 'alchemical principal' to my body and decant the 'essence of me' from the remains of my daily bath. By using my own bath water, I felt I was adding another element to the liquid mix, an attempt to capture something intrinsically of myself, contained within the discarded fluids from my daily existence. With the intention of creating a type of self-portraiture, I appropriated the alchemical philosophy of *quinta essentia* – 'the essence of life'.<sup>64</sup> My developed sculptural forms are constructed from transformed and odorous substances that act as mediums of the imaginary surface layers that surround the real body. These substances are imagined as capable of merging the inside and outside body, dissolving interiority and privacy and its corporeal opposite the external, exposed body.

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<sup>64</sup> Aftel, M. (2001) *Essence and Alchemy - a Book of Perfume*, Aftel's reference taken from the teachings of Paracelsus, a sixteenth century Physician and Alchemist, 'The *quinta essentia* is that which is extracted from a substance - from all plants and from everything that has life' (London: Bloomsbury) p. 23.



### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued

I have developed a liquid mix into a type of plastic polymer that is capable of transformation into another state. This polymer acts in a way similar to a chemical unguent, a substance that allows a slippage from one material state to another; and, most importantly, is capable of transgressive and transformative possibilities. The nature of this solidified liquid mix is not fixed, nor is it complete. The process, involving different stages of chemical reactions - mixing, boiling, fermenting, curing, drying - continues long after my artistic involvement ceases. The 'mix' has a physical and imaginary existence of its own.



Fig. 31  
Anna Phillips  
*golden glob*, 2002, variable dimensions.

The next step after developing this solidified substance was to employ it in association with the theories of writers and artists who refer to an alternative or unique form of feminine representation.

At this stage in my early research, I had little clue as to what shape these sculptural forms would take. I had some mental images envisioning formless blobs, with some thought of Joseph Beuys and his lumps of fat. The terrifying realities of spittle and other formless matter in George Bataille's essay 'The Formless'<sup>68</sup> gave me some ideas. Rachel Whiteread's rubber sculptures made from the inverted impressions of mortuary slab surfaces also came to mind. I imagined streams of gossamer-thin layers of transparent pink Deleauzean folds wafting around the room. The odorous sheets that I wished to create, once

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<sup>68</sup> Bataille, G, 'The Formless', included in *Visions of Excess* selected writings 1927-1939. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota), p.31



### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued

suspended, would speak of the dual functions of real and imaginary skin. As well, they would be illustrative of a new medium, describing subjective embodiment and lived feminine experience.

I love having a bath every morning, completing the experience by washing my hair; slowly sinking under the surface for an almost complete body submersion, holding my breath as long as possible, then rinsing out all the lathery suds. It is an intimate private ritual, one of the luxuries of having a large old bath. To make sculptures during my candidature I decanted litres of this murky fluid into large plastic phials. I then transported these contemporary amphorae to my studio.



Fig. 32

Illustration from an English women's magazine, 1950s.

I enjoy browsing in different convenience stores and pharmacies. Clean, bright, artificial environments that contain bountiful quantities of every imaginable beauty aid dutifully stacked on shelves, each insistent on its own vital importance and uniqueness. I buy litres of commercially prepared shampoo and I have acquired litres of shampoo given to me by disappointed consumers who have purchased a new shampoo brand that offered some kind of transformational potential in its mutating plastic form, but the results failed to match up with buyer expectations of the product. I have observed that even cheap shampoo brands are loaded with appropriated images of watery Venus iconography and feminised flowery odours and colours. Interestingly, the more expensive the brand of shampoo, the less amount of liquid it contains. It appears that the less the fluid, the greater its supposed properties of sacredness and goodness.



Fig. 33  
Preparing the shampoo and bath water mixture.

For my experiments I adapted recipes from an old manual given to me by a former student colleague which contained a formula on how to make printer's ink. Using this I made my first tentative brews of the solidified shampoo and bath-water mix. As an intuitive cook and a gazer at recipe book pictures rather than a person who slavishly follows prescriptive texts, I refused to be precise regarding empirical measurement and temperature range. I relied on this sloppy methodology because I wanted to avoid being too rigid with my experiments. Of course, with this reliance on 'trial and error', variations did occur, but rather than see these inconsistencies as mistakes or costly failures, I saw them as opportunities to be open to the 'happy accident' and other surprise discoveries. I preferred to 'slosh in' and mix up (and make-up) the ingredient list as the individual uniqueness of concocting each brew allowed. Not surprisingly, important elements were tricky to maintain at a constant level. For example, shampoo liquid brands vary in their viscosity and colour. Bath-water looked dull on certain days. Doubts began to plague my mind. People kept asking me unanswerable questions like; how long does boiled shampoo last, will it crack up, dry out, fall apart, tear across, rip to shreds, melt in a puddle, be strong enough?

I did not know the answers to any of the above questions, but I felt compelled to keep going. I was on a journey without a map to find the middle place to which Solnit refers. In addition, the magic of witnessing the transformation of a warm free-flowing liquid into a solid state was irresistible; even if I was unsure how the finished sculptures would end up or where my theoretical investigations would take me.



### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued



Fig. 34  
Studio working area.

The whole process had a performative and immediate quality. I would make the pieces very quickly over a period of days. The moment of pouring became quite intense and important, everything riding on an even pour being applied to the surface template. I learnt the importance of applying a releasing agent to the template surface before the actual pour commenced. Many frustrating hours were tediously spent picking away at solidified layers. Also the reading of artist Rachael Whiteread's hilarious first time attempts, at removing unbudgable slabs of rubber from the top of a stainless steel mortuary table, rang true for some of my own tricky endeavours.



Fig. 35  
Lifting cured skin #1.

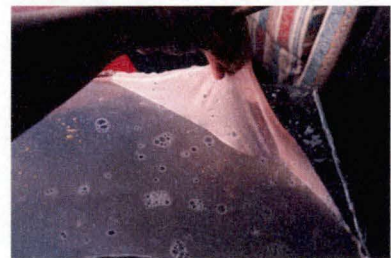


Fig. 36  
Lifting cured skin #2.

Once this non-stick lesson was learnt, I would always apply a releasing agent first. I preferred using flowery scented hand creams that promised 'younger, smoother looking skin' in their advertising testimonials. I thought it best to stick with substances that were coded with feminine imagery and claimed balsamic properties in the contents. My greased up fingers would massage the original template, feeling all of its irregularities and nuances, knowing that the solidified shampoo/bath water mix was capable of perfectly imitating that surface. I would then rapidly apply the boiling fluid using a ladle or a paintbrush, depending on the required thickness or transparency of the layers intended for that piece.

### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued

When standing over the steaming brew I felt I was doing something rather alchemical and transgressive. While stirring the pot, I saw flashes of molten liquid swirling below me. I could not help but breathe in the sweet vapours that emanated from the boiling bubbles and I felt almost intoxicated and dizzy at these moments of creating the fluid mix, with its heady combinations of vibrant colours and cloying aromas.

People would come sniffing to my studio door and remark, 'I can smell tinned pineapple coming down the corridor'. Comments such as these made me feel quite excited and I would hurriedly combine additional fragrant ingredients while pondering what other characteristics and potential properties this odorous solidified substance might possess.

As my confidence and experience grew, I began to add more ingredients to the brew to determine other undiscovered olfactory possibilities as well as other sensory potentials. I had started looking at the relationship between odour and memory. I was hoping to evoke forgotten memories by manipulating odours emanating from the sculptures. The importance of personal scent and body odour became central to my investigations. In my attempts to illustrate the Imaginary Body, I decided to incorporate the often overlooked and devalued attribute of body odour as a device to help unlock personal memories and associations for the viewer.

Continuing with the methodology of my art-making process,

I observed that within an hour after the combined fluid was poured onto the surface of the mould, the first signs of solidification occurred. The next stage after setting, which I referred to as 'curing', came when the solidified substance hardened and became self-supporting. This part of the process could take up to a week, and was one that required patience. Trying to remove the skin before it had 'cured' would end in rips and tears. To test, after a few days I would gently peel away a small section of the skin to ascertain if it was ready to be pared. If it were, I would lift the rest of the skin from the mould. Other times I would pour the liquid into a solid block, similar to the layering of sedimentary rock.

### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued

I often found the single large pour unsatisfactory due to the uncontrollable nature of the liquid. Tiresome spills could occur with this method. I learnt it was far better to control the flow by repeating or ‘topping-up’ smaller pours. Plasticine became an important support material, pliable enough to roll up into a little wall necessary to create an edge for the poured liquid. At other times I preferred the flow of the liquid not to be blocked. I let it spill out in its own directions, always mindful of the level surface and uneven thickened edges, as a consequence of ignoring the need for a flat mould.

I also ran into problems if the temperature of the mixture cooled too quickly, or refused to set if proportions were unbalanced. In the final stage I established a routine mix of ingredients and the appropriate working conditions.

I focused on incorporating domestic surfaces that came from feminine coded interior spaces such as the bathroom and, in particular, using damaged interior-decoration accessories, such as cracked ceramic tiling, eroded rubber bathmats and domestic materials such as embossed wallpaper and curtain drapes. I made plaster and latex impressions of these. I wanted template surfaces that allowed frequent contact with the real body. I was keen to examine the ‘build up’ effect of repeated marks on these surfaces as well as any temporary dents and scarification left on the body made from repeated exposure to these domestic surfaces.

#### Early Works

##### Phase 1

###### *pupae*

5-10cm, baby soft, pastel coloured pupae were early forms made as part of my research project. I wanted to investigate the nut kernel beginnings (if at all possible) where these repetitious images of the feminine originated.



### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued



Fig. 37  
Anna Phillips  
*pupae*, 1999.

After an amusing read of Camille Paglia's explanation of feminine origins and personae, I decided to blend some of her ideas with other influences. For example, Paglia illustrates her version of feminine beginnings as an albumin-rich site of placental jellyfish immersed in spongy membranes sloshing around in relation to lunar cycles.<sup>69</sup>

Initially, to create a contrast with the slippery visceral qualities of the piece, I placed the forms in a stainless steel kidney dish but, for this submission, they are placed on clear perspex, alluding to a microscope's glass slide. The odour and colour of the pupae were also very important. I wanted to use pastel shades and flowery odours, traditionally associated with the feminine. The forms looked soft and spongy like 'sugar candy', good enough to eat. I intended to present the pupae as something to be admired or even digested.

#### *sticky pillow*

Next, I made a fleshy life-sized pillow from the solidified mixture. The idea of laying your head on something sticky and reeking so strongly of pungent sweet rose odours, seemed strangely appealing. The tension created by combining these oppositional sensory and tactile qualities brought an interesting viewer response. These ranged from abject horror to delighted wonder. The skin surface of the pillow was embossed in a flowery decorative pattern, but during the lifting of the membrane from its original template, some of the solidified skin, which adhered to the template surface, began to slough off in sections. My first reaction was the sculpture had been unsuccessful, however, on closer inspection, I

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<sup>69</sup> Paglia, C. (1992) *Sex and Violence, or Nature and Art*,

### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued

decided that the remaining broken fragments looked very much like scalded or boiled skin. This flaking skin reminded me of Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque body and the exaggeration associated with transforming body parts in the act of becoming.<sup>70</sup>



Fig. 38  
Anna Phillips  
*sticky pillow*, 2000.  
150mm(h) x 400mm (w) x 100mm(d).

#### Phase 11

The flawed skin in the above sculpture evoked the psychological feeling of abjection, even in myself. At this point, there was a curious coincidence. Just as I was working with skins and their imaginary layers, I discovered the writings of Julia Kristeva and, how she had illustrated her ideas on the abject by referring to skin surfaces. In *Powers of Horror: an essay on Abjection* (1982) Kristeva uses the analogy of skin on the surface of boiled milk to explain the experience of abjection. It is, she writes, 'when the eyes or the lips touch that skin that a gagging sensation ensues'.<sup>71</sup> She suggests that when the skin on the milk touches the skin of the observer's lips,

it threatens the border between the object, milk, and the subject.

When this boundary is breached, the object is transformed into an abject thing. The observer recoils with an uncomfortable feeling of recognition from something that looks familiar, almost fleshy, and that could have

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(London: Penguin) p. 16.

<sup>70</sup> Bakhtin in S. Stewart, (1993) 'The Grotesque Body' in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (Durham and London: Duke University press) p. 105.

<sup>71</sup> Kristeva, J. (1982) *Powers of Horror: an essay on Abjection* quoted in I. Tyler, 'Skin tight - Celebrity, Pregnancy and Subjectivity' in *Thinking through the Skin*, (2001) S. Ahmed & J. Stacey (eds), (London: Routledge) pp. 69-83.

### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued

originated from the self, but is now apart, causing a psychological schism to occur, separating that thing from the self.

When my sculptures become old, some of the edges dry and lift up into strange surface irregularities, looking very much like dried-out old skin.

The next sculptures I made referred to the more dangerous and challenging representations of the feminine, the femme fatale. Mario Praz's description in *The Romantic Agony*,<sup>72</sup> gives a condensed reference to femme fatale types and their mythological sources. Languid seductiveness, flowing, borderless, undefinable, and out of control were the characteristics I wanted to imbue in some of my sculptures. I looked at the far-reaching implications and importance of late 19th century romantic aesthetic taste and the feminine idealism, which was fuelled by the Pre-Raphaelite Movement. They identified the femme-fatale, as the dark half of the dualistic concept of the Eternal Feminine, the Mary Magdalene/Eve dichotomy. French decadent writer, Charles Baudelaire, was also obsessed by this sexually dangerous type of woman and used this theme constantly in his work. The identification of the femme fatale legitimised references to this type of woman and as a result this representation of the feminine, which had proliferated throughout 'high art' history, moved into the daily exposure of popular culture and advertising where we see it today.

#### *just a slip of a thing* (2001) and *inner golden strength* (2001)

These two pieces included femme fatale characteristics. The pieces were initially suspended on stocking clips, but this proved too difficult a resolution since they were indeed too slippery to be fastened under hot gallery lights by clips alone. *just a slip of a thing* resembled metallic coloured lingerie, all glossy and silky, the light reflecting from its supple folds and flowing contours. *inner golden strength* was a length of golden coloured 'cloth' imbued with associations of European chic and regal splendour. I wanted to create a sense of liquid materiality and its presentation evolved, from hanging like a wet towel over a chrome rail and being rolled up in a loose ball like a piece of well-chewed gum.

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<sup>72</sup> Praz, M. (1933) *The Romantic Agony*, (London: Oxford University Press) passim.



### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued

Unfortunately, this piece provoked a very negative response from an anonymous viewer and during my absence it was set alight one night. As distressing as this event was, the scabby burnt remains of this once golden glob still really interested me. I did not proceed any further with this idea; but it reminded me of the constantly changing surface layers of the skin.

I had felt that the sculpture resonated with dangerous femme fatale characteristics, and I was not really surprised when somebody tried to destroy it.



Fig. 39  
*just a slip of a thing*, 2001.



Fig. 40  
*inner golden strength*, 2001.

#### ***blu rinse*** (2001)

The next sculpture I created was in response to what I perceived as clever advertising and the appropriation of descriptions of natural substances and their associated properties of goodness into the list of contents on the back of the shampoo bottle. Some brands of shampoo capitalise on their associations with the life-giving properties of the sea, with splashy, drippy imagery and fishy odours. The sculpture, called *blu rinse*, was composed of three large sheets hung over chrome bathroom towel rails. I wanted to establish the importance of the bathroom as an intimate location where transformational experiences can take place. Thus, the shampoo chosen for this piece came from the Natural bottle type in my shampoo bottle taxonomy.<sup>73</sup> Its contents alluded to organic

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<sup>73</sup> See Appendix B.

### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued

ingredients and wholesomeness, capturing their essences in a chemical formula.

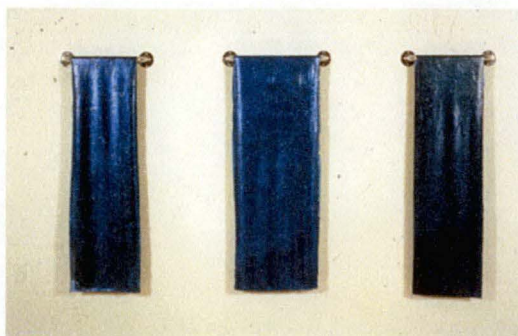


fig. 41  
Anna Phillips  
*blu rinse*, 2001  
1500mm(h) x 450mm(w) x 1mm(d).

The three 1800mm sheets were suspended in a row, each coloured florescent marine blue to enhance their sea associations. The sticky sheets tended to fasten together, but could easily be separated with a little gentle intervention. As I peeled these layers apart, I noticed that at the moment of separation, a space appeared between the two flesh-like layers. This potential space existed only momentarily in its artificial construction but appeared to emulate real skin layers. Nearly four years on, this sculpture has not lost any of its plasticity or vivid colour. Its odour is less fishy, but the associations with flesh, are still very strong.

#### *stuck on you* (2002)

The next sculpture I made was a large pink embossed sheet that looked very much like a shower curtain. In fact, many people assumed that it was a real shower curtain, till they got up close to the sculpture and noticed that the swirls and decorative patterns on the surface were actually solidified liquids and captured bubbles. The greasy surface of the pink sheet also looked like unwashed skin. I was interested in exploring below the skin surface layer, with its hidden features and character. I referred to electron microscope images to illustrate different skin surfaces, such as those we see in pores and blemishes. I was interested in skin irregularities, which provide uneven but increased surfaces to enhance filtration and osmosis from the inside to the outside and vice versa.





Fig. 42  
Anna Phillips  
*stuck on you*, 2002  
1700mm(h) x 600mm(w) x 1mm(d).

I continued making lots of experiments with the solidified mix at this time. Keen to see how far I could push the mixture's capabilities, I made an orange coloured and citrus smelling skin, moulded from the underside of an old rubber shower mat. Rows of little sucker pads, which normally are not seen, were now inverted, creating a malleable but irregular surface, which appeared quite visceral and anatomical in quality.

#### ***pink nodes*** (2002)

I made a series of pink fleshy nodules about 10cm in height, which were additional experimental skin surfaces. I presented these nodules in a clear plastic box similar to that found in contemporary beauty product packaging and I thought this sculpture had the same type of appeal. I am very interested in how make-up and beauty products are presented as fetishised objects in our consumer culture.

I completed some experiments with a vacuum forming mould-making machine thanks to the assistance of a fellow student, who made a clever machine with the reverse suction from an old vacuum cleaner. I heated up small sections of cut-up shampoo bottle plastic and then laid them over plaster casts. They made the perfect nodule shape, looking very suggestive of a skin-like surface, and something entirely edible.

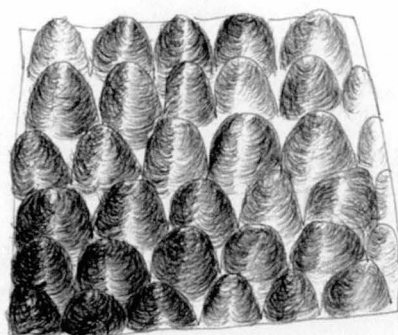


Fig. 43  
Anna Phillips  
drawing of *pink nodes*, 2002

#### *lipstick skins* (2002)

I was intrigued by how many transformative substances such as make-up and shampoo have been given enticing names associated with the body, such as *pink nude*, *red pulse*, *lilac blush*, *peach pout*, *pink smile*. In glossy women's magazines, these substances are presented as magical, transformative, special treats and personal indulgences. I decided to make curtain length sections of different shades of pink, named from lipstick titles. As part of my investigations I looked up references to the colour pink and its fascinating historical connections. Penny Sparke in her text explores how colour differentiation underpins gender relationships and helps establish links to domestic environments. Gold with the colour pink has also been used to evoke associations with 'good taste' reflecting bourgeois visions of the home.<sup>74</sup> The swag of curtain lengths mimicked real cloth folds and fitted well with my interest in the relationship between cloth folds and depictions of the feminine. Lingerie has an individual and intimate relationship with the skin. As well as being a coding device to promote certain representations of femininity, depictions of cloth in art history have been used to add a classical legitimacy to paintings and sculptures<sup>75</sup>

Some of my cloth-like created skins were in pearly pink and others more matt pink tones. When hung over an aluminium shower curtain rail their

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<sup>74</sup> Sparke, P. (1995) *As Long as its Pink*, (London: Pandora) p. 145.

<sup>75</sup> Chenoune, F. (1998) *Hidden Femininity - 20<sup>th</sup> Century Lingerie*, (London: Thames and Hudson) p. 13.

### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued

edges overlapped and clung together. Their combined odours were sickly and sweet.

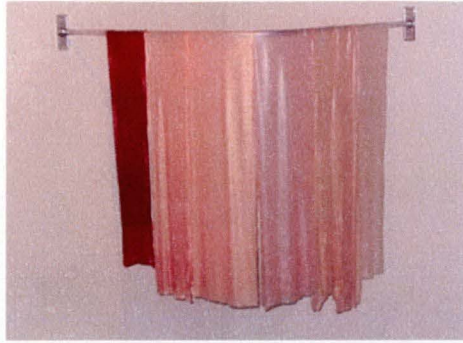


Fig. 44

Anna Phillips

*lipstick skins*, 2002

Each skin approx. 1500mm(h) x 400mm(w) x 1mm (d).

#### ***making money*** (2003)

In 2003, I was invited by the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, to take part in their Intervention program,<sup>76</sup> and respond to their existing permanent displays and collections. I was very taken by the patina of old coins and their honey-coloured wooden display cabinets. Many of the coins were impressed with the images of a woman or goddess figure. Around the face and figure, flowery imagery was dominant. For my intervention I suspended a three-metre length golden coloured skin in the Numismatics room and made injection moulded plastic shampoo bottle coins. The skin lengths were embossed with coin imprints and, on the floor, lay individual coins looking as if they had just fallen off a conveyor belt from a money-making machine. I wanted to test the physicality of the substance I had developed. How large could I make the skin lengths and to what extent would they support and take their own weight. The piece shimmered under the gallery floodlights.

During the final year of my research I suspended my post-graduate degree for a five-month period to take up the McCulloch Studio Scholarship award for residency at the Cite Internationale des Artes in Paris (October 2002-February 2003). I had been awarded this Residency to study odour, and its historical, social and mythological importance. I

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<sup>76</sup> Hansen, D. (2003) 'The Curatorship of Historical Material', *Art Monthly*, (Australia) December 03 - February 04, pp. 26-29.



### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued

wanted to investigate how odour is related to perception, memory and imagination. I visited many fascinating places such as the Perfume Museum, the Parisian sewers and the Pasteur Museum. I spent endless hours walking up and down the banks of the Seine and engaged, at a furious pace, in art-making from my research findings. Two of the following pieces made in response to my residency, impacted on my Ph.D research, notably *lost and found gloves* and *fit for a King*.

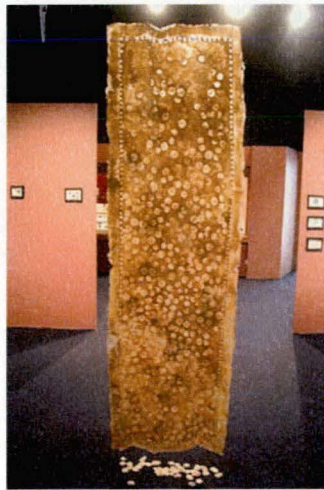


Fig. 45  
Anna Phillips  
*Golden Shower*.

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 2003  
2300mm(h) x 500mm(w) x 1mm(d).

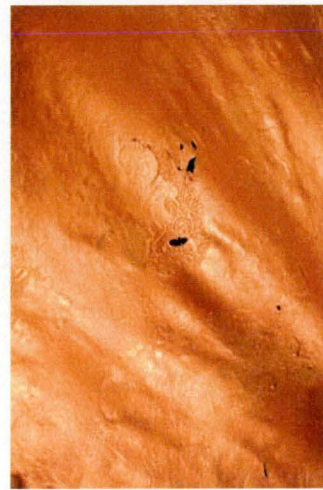


Fig. 46  
Anna Phillips  
*Golden Shower* (detail).

## Phase 111

*lost and found gloves* Paris October 2002- February 2003.

I collected gloves from the streets and buildings of Paris. I had just read of the importance of the glove in the history of French Perfumery. Apparently the perfumery industry grew out of the glove trade. The treatment of the skins used in glove-making made fascinating research. Mandy Aftel's<sup>77</sup> text was invaluable here. Traditionally, perfumers impregnated the soft kid leather with particular odours, which could identify the wearer with the olfactory-enhanced and observant individual and, also, could exaggerate certain odorous charms and seductive associations that the wearer wished to promote or own. Those with malicious intent could incorporate this knowledge for more evil motives. 60

### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued

Catherine de Medici allegedly sent poisoned gloves to her mother-in-law. I collected 180 lost gloves during my residency. They were very poignant gloves, some limp and sad, others with fingers contorted into poses of indignation and annoyance, but each smelt of its anonymous absent owner. I decided that with this new awareness of the connection of human odour to emotions, subjectivity and memory, I would control certain odorous associations that I wished to promote in my own art-making practice.



Fig. 47  
Anna Phillips in front of *lost and found gloves*, Paris, 2002 – 2003,  
Photograph by Nathalie Latham, Paris, France.

#### *fit for a King* (2003)

The second sculpture made on my return to Tasmania in 2003, was included in the touring exhibition, *Haven*.<sup>78</sup> The piece was composed of a three-metre width of solidified skin made from shampoo, wine and blood. I had been asked to respond to the life and times of a notable Tasmanian, Jorgen Jorgensen, an eccentric Dane who came to Tasmania twice in the 1800s, once as the ship's navigator on the *Lady Nelson* and, the second time, as a life-sentenced convict. Jorgensen's colourful life included a nine-and-a-half-week residency as the self-proclaimed king of Iceland. He was also a prolific writer and artist, recording momentous events in Tasmanian history. Unfortunately, Jorgensen had a drinking and gambling problem, and he died penniless and alone in Hobart Town in 1846 and was buried in an unmarked grave. The sculpture I made in response to his sad life was called *fit for a King*,

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<sup>77</sup> Aftel, M. (2001) *Essence and Alchemy - a Book of Perfume*, (London: Bloomsbury) p. 27.

### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued

and was imbued with associations of tragedy, pain, spilt blood and red wine. At the Paris Perfume Museum, I had researched the extraction processes of enfleurage and maceration<sup>79</sup> and, once back in Tasmania, had managed to install the odour of wine and blood into the sculptural cape using these techniques.



Fig. 48  
Anna Phillips  
*fit for a King*, 2003  
2300mm(h) x 800mm(w) x 650mm(d).



Fig. 49  
Anna Phillips  
*fit for a King*, (detail) 2003.

#### *transparent skin sphere* (2003)

With collected gutter water I created a very exciting piece that was based on the microscopic building blocks of the body, the cell and its minute structures called organelles.<sup>80</sup> I made a transparent sphere of solidified liquids from a cast lifted from an old greasy plastic tablecloth and I transferred this tablecloth from outside my studio to the gallery wall. It was quite an event walking the piece over to the Carnegie Gallery, Hobart. It required a small team of helpers to keep it from sticking to itself, and then to raise the tablecloth up vertically, sticking and peeling it onto the white gallery wall. Once stuck up and patted into place, the film of solidified gutter water took on an almost ethereal luminous

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<sup>78</sup> *Haven* was an initiative of Curator Kevin Murray. The work was shown in Hobart, 2003 and toured to Burnie, and the Victorian Craft Council, Flinders Lane, Melbourne [2003].

<sup>79</sup> Enfleurage and maceration are French words used to describe perfume extraction techniques used on flower petals to render their fragrance into a fatty pomade, from which a powerful scented oil can be derived. See M. Aftel (2001) *Essence and Alchemy – a Book of Perfume*, (London: Bloomsbury) p. 30.

<sup>80</sup> An organelle is a microscopic structure that resides inside the basic building block of life - the cell.



### Chapter 3 How the project was pursued

presence. The hairs and grit contained in the mix became a metaphor for substances that make up our natural selves.

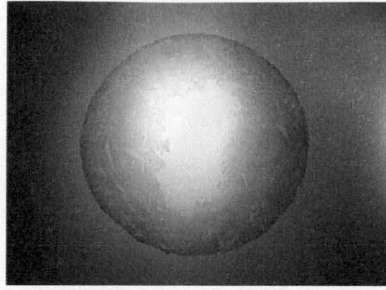


Fig. 50  
Anna Phillips

*transparent skin sphere* Carnegie Gallery, Hobart, 2003.

Perhaps the most important piece of investigation that I engaged with during my research project involved my drawings and selected writings accumulated during this period in thirty-odd visual diaries and journals. As a consequence of investigating abstract notions such as the imaginary body and other invisible sensory experiences, my drawings became crucial in assisting me to turn these imaginary abstractions into visible sculptural forms. I would draw and redraw the same 'figures'. The automatic marks I was making were attempts to connect with a more subconscious and spontaneous way of visualising the works. I had no real idea what form these ideas would take when I started the project, but as I was constantly outlining the same organic shapes and patterns, the imaginary ideas became more concrete and transferred easily to a physical reality. Reading texts from a wide range of sources helped inform my thinking and gave me structural ideas from which to work. The advertising images in glossy magazines, included lipsticks and spilt nail varnish, curtain swag instruction books and monochromatic Victorian drawings of anatomical layers of the skin and its insides; all became relevant and inspirational for my art-making.



Fig. 51 Journal drawing, 2003.



Fig. 52 Journal drawing, 2003.

### Chapter 4 Related Art Practices

Over the period of my candidature the developing work passed through three distinct stages. In each phase I referred to women artists whose art practice directly informed my own art making at that time.

In the initial phase, I investigated the work of Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse and Lynda Benglis. (See later for discussion of Benglis.) I had just commenced investigating the properties of my solidified substance and, keen to explore the notion of formlessness, I was beginning to make fleshy sculptural masses.

I saw images of Bourgeois' work and was instantly attracted to it. Her anthropomorphic shapes and organic forms appeared to reference an absent figure, and contained brutal emotions related to sexuality and innocence. The materials that she chose to make the work were extremely relevant to the subject matter. Even though Bourgeois works with fairly traditional cold materials, such as wood and metal, under her direction they become liquid and flowing, exuding oppositional qualities of feminine sensuality and rawness.

I wanted to imbue my own work with such embodied energy.



Fig. 52  
Louise Bourgeois  
*Janus Fleuri*, 1968, bronze.

I was also greatly inspired by American artist Eva Hesse. Her personal life experiences are clearly evident in the type of art works she created. Hesse manipulated oppositional material elements that referred to her own physical and emotional body.

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The influence of Minimalism is also evident in Hesse's work with regard to her subversion of the grid pattern and reductive use of materials. As, Linda Norden pointed out, in her essay about Hesse, 'Getting to "Ick": To Know What One is Not' Hesse's work moved beyond the interrogative style of others in this male dominated movement through the way that she humanised her materials. Norden also discussed the point that, unlike some male artists working during this period, whose intent was to control the perceptions of, and critical response to, their work – through their own writing and published dialogues - Hesse remained unaffected by this influence and used instead, a descriptive rather than prescriptive choice of prose when recounting her own work.<sup>81</sup>

Hesse combined materials that evoked contrasting emotional states such as hardness and softness and fragility and toughness. She combined these oppositional qualities in her intimate and droopy sac-like forms and her transparent skins. Hesse's work was a perfect illustration of what I was looking for. Beyond the references to Abstract Expressionism and other intellectual discourses written about Hesse, she herself stressed the 'biological absurdity' and 'ickyness' of the work.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Norden, L. 'Getting to "Ick": To Know What One Is Not' in H. Cooper *Eva Hesse: a Retrospective*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press) p. 51-74.

<sup>82</sup> Norden, L. p. 54-57.

## Chapter 4 Related Art Practices



Fig. 53  
Eva Hesse,  
Test piece for *Contingent*, 1969,  
114inx168inx36in.

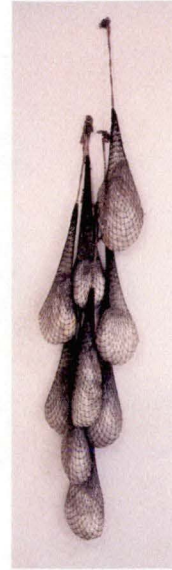


Fig. 54  
Eva Hesse,  
*Untitled or Not Yet*, 1969,  
72in x 24in. x 14in.

With the work of these two artists' resonating in my mind, I turned my attention to other artists who were expressing femininity in their work, by using metaphorical references through the material and substances they employed. I had one slight problem with latex, the material Hesse pioneered in her embodied forms; I found its yellow, sagging nature extremely abject.

I researched artists who made sculptures from unconventional, gender specific materials, either 'masculine' such as building site hardware - tough, long-lasting and durable - or its gender-coded opposite, sculpture made from transient feminised substances, such as hair dye and lipstick. The use of make-up as a sculptural material is provocative and an interesting choice in that it is a material that covers the surface of the skin, and conceals what lies within. In some circles, make-up is seen as a frivolous and unnecessary commodity loaded with popular cultural associations related to objectification, vanity and artifice, but some artists have managed to appropriate the value systems of these substances and to utilise their significance and relevance in their forms. The negative suppositions concerning these types of substances made them appealing, because their inclusion as non-traditional media 'thumbs the nose' at the canons of what constitutes 'high art'. In addition, they reinforce the importance of the domestic in art making.



## Chapter 4 Related Art Practices

Another characteristic these particular artists share is that they have all successfully managed to reinvent their chosen materials into something remarkably new by, at times, using a combination of their chosen material and its abject opposite. The use of unexpected materials, in unforeseen circumstances can, in the first instance, generate surprise in the unsuspecting viewer who, in recognizing something familiar becomes disorientated by the ambiguity. However, once the familiar identity and expected use have been questioned, the form potentially can be experienced as a thing, inviting the consideration of its 'new' promise. As examples of these phenomena, I find the materials chosen by some artists very evocative. Helen Chadwick's photographic image of pink pig intestines plaited with locks of golden hair; Rachael Whiteread's use of flaccid slabs of rubber and Janine Antoni's mopping a gallery floor with her hair.



Fig. 55.  
Helen Chadwick. *Loop my Loop*, 1991, 127cmx26cmx17cm.



Fig. 56  
Janine Antoni, *Loving care*, 1975. Anthony D' Offey Gallery, Performance Art, London.

In the second phase of the project, I commenced making sculptural skins and orifices. I investigated women artists who made use of cropped body parts or who abstracted bodily substances to describe subjective states of embodiment and being. During this phase I looked at Hannah Wilkes 1992 *S.O.S – Starification Object Series*, and one of Anne Hamilton's 1996 video works, (untitled - aleph), and her 1996 sculpture and mixed media installation completed for the 1996 Sydney Biennale, titled *filament*.



## Chapter 4 Related Art Practices

In the final phase of my candidature, I was attempting to locate visual structures and forms for my intended submission pieces. I concentrated on researching artists who create art-work related to imaginary or hybridised bodies, such as the Australian installation and video artist Patricia Piccinini. I was also attracted to the unique olfactory experiences created by Scottish odour artist Clare Ursitti.

With all the visual artists that I examined, the thing I found most thrilling was that they acknowledged the process of making, as the central element concerning the artistic outcome of their work. The artists I have chosen to investigate make works that sit within, what Rebecca Solnit labelled, the Feminine Aesthetic.

The word 'feminine' is problematic in popular culture and art history. Its negative associations and definitions include weakness, paleness and passivity. However, many innovative female artists and writers have rejected these assumptions, and have created alternative dialogues and art works, by actively promoting intimate and uniquely feminine perceptions as a device to locate more 'real' representations of the feminine.

In the following section of this chapter, I will examine some of the artists of particular interest in greater depth.

### Phase 1

For this part of the inquiry, I referred to the early work of Lynda Benglis. Her work contained strong emotional content and intimacy in its constructed forms, suggesting painful psychological states and raw emotionalism within its mass. On seeing gritty black and white images of Benglis' work in a 1970s publication I was instantly intrigued. The forms looked recognizable and unfamiliar all at the same time. It looked as though Benglis had poured multiple layers of molten liquid over the floor. A short essay by Peter Schjeldahl, suggested that Benglis' work, made from non-organic, non-traditional materials, such as puffy coloured polyurethane, reads like a layered metaphor for the

## Chapter 4 Related Art Practices

human body. Examples, from her 1977-1978 period, displayed strong oppositional tensions in the bio-morphic forms. Schjeldahl wrote 'all good art tends to combine opposites, and in Benglis' case, a palpable combination of aggression and delicacy existed'.<sup>83</sup>

It was this reference to 'opposites' that caught my attention.

The work did suggest certain mind/body states, most strikingly, a curious blend of anxiety and ecstasy. It invited recognition of something familiar, almost figurative; lumpy, bumpy, sexualised forms that were fleshy and erotic but, at the same time, grotesque and confronting. Gravitational weight appears to have made the stuff ooze up and beyond a submerged border, its form lolling over itself as its mass spread outwards, to be stopped in its tracks only by a fortunate setting, suspended in time.



Fig. 57  
Lynda Benglis,  
*Eat Meat*, 1978.  
Pigmented polyurethane.

Her pigmented polyurethane foam sculptures *Untitled* (1968), and *Eat Meat* (1975), are enigmatic illustrations of a successful combination of material opposites. Her use of materials provides the tension between palpable aggression and spontaneous delicacy and her use of colour is exact. She intentionally chooses bold colours, knowing that they are imbued with powerful emotional connections and energy. This energy resonates from within the sculptural mass, rather than acting only as decorated surface artifice.

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<sup>83</sup> Schjeldahl, P. (1979) 'Body and Soul' essay written in conjunction with the exhibition *Lynda Benglis: 1967-1978*, Paula Cooper Gallery, Miami, (Florida: University of Miami).

## Chapter 4 Related Art Practices

Erica-Lynn Huberty, in a 2000 interview with Benglis, described these early works as monstrosities.<sup>84</sup> Benglis responded to this comment by saying that she did not find them so; rather, she liked the idea that they might be alive. Later pieces are comprised of metal knots and twisted loops, which refer to an organic internal body, contorted with emotional intensity and spontaneity.

I was inspired by Benglis' 1960-70s works, as I had read that her art making was a response to her own psychic being and surroundings. I found some of her sculptures shocking, and others pathetically sad and sexually explicit. Benglis' work has a sense of otherworldliness, its supposed function unknown, it acts as a reminder of past emotional experiences. The flaccid sac-like forms evoke an impression of a grotesque body, or more tellingly, an inner body, turned outwards. The fragile materiality of the work reinforces its transgressive qualities. Benglis' sculptures are abstract but exist in an atmosphere of figuration and embodiment. They are very different from any other work I have seen.

### Phase 11

During this phase I researched the art practice of Ann Hamilton, an American artist whose evocative installations reference the body and states of interiority. She often uses unconventional materials to build up a collage of metaphors that speak to the condition of lived experience, materials such as horse-hair, honey-coated pennies and tooth-picks that elicit sensory responses and memories rooted in the viewer's body. By emphasising the material presence of the work and its appeal to the senses, Hamilton suggests that knowledge is gained both bodily and intellectually. The scale of her work supports this notion, as she transforms the traditional relationship between the viewer and the work by literally taking the viewer inside the sculptures.

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<sup>84</sup> Huberty, E. L. (2000) 'Intensity of form and surface - an interview with Lynda Benglis' in *Sculpture Magazine*, July/August 2000, Vol. 19, No.6, pp. 1-8. see <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/hamilton>, (last visited 3/11/03)



Fig. 58  
Anne Hamilton,  
*filament*, 1996.  
Photographic image taken from The 10<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney,  
*Jurassic Technologies Revenant*, 1996.

I attended the 10<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney, *Jurassic Technologies Revenant*, (1996), at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and there experienced first-hand Hamilton's installation *filament*. This work consisted of 20ft of suspended black cloth, which was slowly agitating in a circular motion, similar to a washing machine cycle. The viewer was able to step inside and enter the dark innards of its claustrophobic and moving material interior. Once inside, captured between the suffocating and stuffy folds, it was difficult to exit, or negotiate movement, for fear of becoming entangled in the forceful revolving swish. Panic and resistance soon gave way to the sheer thrill of being consumed by such an intoxicating and unique interior experience and being 'shut off' from the world outside.

In a published interview Hamilton spoke of her interest in seeking or remarking on, the borders of things. She said,

You know, we as bodies inherit ourselves as both containers and being contained. The paradoxical structure of my work is often to engage that place of in-betweenness; to engage it, not to make a picture of it, not to make it its subject, but actually to try to work in a way that demonstrates it, that occupies it.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Hamilton, A. (2003) 'Pinhole Photos: "face to face"', *ART* 21 pp. 1-3.

## Chapter 4 Related Art Practices

Hamilton's 2002 video works concerning body orifices are equally evocative. The works suggest that orifices in and out of the body are culturally very dangerous places. I examined some of Hamilton's video work, in particular pieces that encapsulate society's nervousness and ambiguity in relation to boundaries of the feminine body, and its orifices. One work shows a close-up of a mouth chewing revolving marbles. The tension derives, partly from the social taboo and prohibitions in popular culture about placing something dangerous or unacceptable in the mouth whilst, at the same time, performing an activity that could cause potential suffocation or obstruction. As well there is the more threatening realisation of witnessing something that goes between, and in and out of, the portals of the body.



Fig. 59  
Anne Hamilton,  
(*untitled - aleph*), video still, 1992.

Hannah Wilke's photographic work was also very informative at this time. Wilke's work is identifiable with the body art period of the 60s and the 70s, when women artists were reaffirming the relevance of their body and its biological origins. This is counter-balanced by cultural values and the beauty of the pieces. Wilke used images of herself to confront conventional objectifying relationships between viewer and subject.

In her *S.O.S – Starification Object Series* (1992) Wilke renders her skin with sticky globs of well-chewed gum received from her audience, while at the same time, undertaking beauty rituals (inserting curlers and hair clips in her hair) in a parody of preparing herself for male inspection and appraisal. The abject shock of seeing her skin surface plastered with sticky labial shaped masses elicits anxiety in any viewer not usually exposed to such



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treatment of the skin; the 'other-side' of hidden beauty rituals, their devices, and the instruments and procedures necessary in any engagement with the decorated skin surface are implicit in these images.



Fig. 60

Hannah Wilke,

*S.O.S – Starification Object Series*, 1992.

Photographic image taken from Wilke's solo exhibition *Intra-Venus* held at the Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York, 1992.

Wilke's photographic self-portrait pieces exhibited at the Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York (1992) were equally poignant. Titled, *Intra-Venus*, this exhibition consisted of life-size photographs of her naked body. Wilke personally selected the images from slides taken by her second husband during the five years she struggled with a malignant cancer that was spreading through her body. In each image Wilke strikes classic model poses, complete with over-burdened fruit-basket, while she peers directly at the viewer from beneath wet hair. Richard Vine, in his article about *Intra-Venus* wrote that the arresting 'kick in the guts' photographs suggest the subliminal power struggles inherent in 'civilised sexuality'.<sup>86</sup>

In the image shown below, Wilke looks comparatively healthy. She offers herself as a naked dripping Venus, only this goddess is in the last stages of a terminal illness, unapologetic for her sagging breasts, defiant with regard to her polluted and leaking body and un-averted gaze. Wilke, according to Vine, sports the saving irony of a performer playing her last, uncompromising role, as dying crone. With its confronting directness the work obliterates any aesthetic defences of conventional renderings of the body. Vine remarks that even at these most humiliating moments, Wilke

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never loses her dignity, or her sense of self-affirmation through corporeal and emotional boldness. I found this work quite upsetting and liberating at the same time. Facing her own mortality, she offers others the opportunity to witness a real interpretation of being strongly feminine, with unabashed candour and courage; it was totally inspiring.



Fig. 61  
Hannah Wilke, *Intra-Venus*, 1992, colour photograph.  
Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

### Phase 111

In the final phase of my art-making I wanted to investigate artists who create work related to imaginary, hybridised bodies, and abstracted constructed spaces suggesting embodiment and feminine odours. I became interested in artists working in cyber realities, bio-genetics and artificial skin construction. One Australian artist who is inspired by cyber and biogenetic realities is installation and video artist Patricia Piccinini. Her work has been shown nationally and internationally and, in 2003, she represented Australia at the Venice Biennale. She showed 15 video pieces alongside life-size sculptures, made from silicone, polyurethane and human hair. She later said of these works;

I could have presented these creatures in a way that would really horrify people or make them pity them, but the characters have integrity and sense of destiny.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Vine, Richard (1994) 'Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York; Hannah Wilke at Ronald Feldman' *Art in America*, May, pp. 108-9.

<sup>87</sup> Low, L. A (2003) 'Genetic possibilities to trouble the heart' pp. 1-2. See <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/05/15/1052885345.htm> (last visited 8/6/03)



Fig. 62  
Patricia Piccinini with one of her creatures – *Meer man*.  
From her installation at the Australian Pavilion, Venice Biennale,  
*We are family*, 2003.

One video piece, included in her Venice exhibition, *We are family* was called *Plasmoid Region*. The work, unlike her cyber creatures, was not based on the human figure, rather, something remotely anatomical, internal or hidden.

This piece, 'Plasmoid Region' was later included in collaboration with choreographer Lucy Guerin included in the 2003 Melbourne International Arts Festival, called *Plasticine Park*. Together, they created a space where three-dimensional bodies and two-dimensional projected images interacted powerfully. The media statement released from the Melbourne festival describes Piccinini's work in *Plasmoid Region* as 'pulsating fleshy images in hypnotic cycles of amorphously corporeal creation and growth'.<sup>88</sup>

I was instantly attracted to this work because it referenced hyper-real, synthetic life forms made from rapidly accelerating stem cell technologies and other scientific biogenetic disciplines referencing life forms. The video replays the ambiguous and disturbing image of the growth cycle of a sensual but grotesque 'thing', as it appears, popping out of an unknown orifice. The viewers could be confused as to whether they are seeing the image from the inside, or are viewing this growth from an unknown outside. This confusion is heightened by the dizzying and unrelenting speed of the 'things' passing through the membranous hole. Piccinini, in an interview

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<sup>88</sup> *Plasmoid Region*, quote taken from artist statement in *Plasticene Growth*, Patricia Piccinini Melbourne Arts Festival (2003).

## Chapter 4 Related Art Practices

with Lenny Ann Low, said her work was confronting because you cannot place it, yet it looks familiar.<sup>89</sup> It is this connection with my own biologically inspired forms that inspired me about her work. Even though Piccinini adopts the notion of family and other stereotypical grouping of figures in her work, she manages to convey something beyond the idealisation of the nuclear family and other predictable depictions of women.

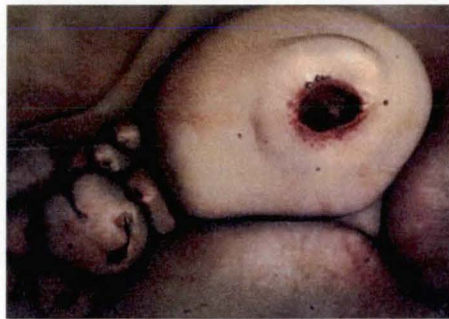


Fig. 63

Patricia Piccinini, *Plasmoid Region*, video still, 2003.

Image taken from *Plasticene Park*, choreography by Lucy Guerin  
Performed at the Melbourne International Arts Festival, 2003.

I chose to investigate Piccinini's work because the rendering of her skin surfaces was of special interest to me. It appears that her creatures in *We are Family* have a distinct skin surface that comes into view as something plastic, both smooth and perfect. However, these artificially constructed skins, unlike the real thing that they simulate, are not penetrable or subject to erosion. Their surface remains a barrier to whatever lies underneath. I suspect it is this rigidity of the surface that adds to the overall impact of Piccinini's work as something unsettling and yet recognizable at the same time. The attainment of perfect skin remains a human objective in our culture, so the flawless skins of Piccinini's creatures promote an unusual appeal and connection, viewers recognize the strange beauty that the creatures project but are also disturbed by their polished exteriors.

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<sup>89</sup> Low, L. A (2003) 'Genetic possibilities to trouble the heart' pp. 1-2.  
see <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/05/15/1052885345.htm>  
(last visited 8/6/03)



## Chapter 4 Related Art Practices

### Clara Ursitti

Working in collaboration with a Scottish industrial chemist

Dr. George Dodd, Canadian born artist Clara Ursitti creates imaginary feminine spaces utilising her own body odour. Ursitti provides her audience with a unique opportunity to engage in confronting olfactory tensions between 'natural' body odour and its olfactory opposite, synthesised pleasant smelling ones. Her exciting work challenges the hegemony of sight and predictable feminine representations in art. Due to sight's visual dominance in western art, other senses have been marginalised or forgotten. Ursitti is currently developing synthetic olfactory 'portraits' of people, places and mood states and she has developed a perfume based on her personal body odour.

Dr. Dodd is reported as saying:

The world of olfaction is a rich seam for an exploration of the inter-relationship between science and art. We are smelly little creatures who live in a visually dominated culture that is uneducated in smell. There is a whole world of social and psychological interaction going on at the level of olfaction that we know almost nothing about..<sup>90</sup>

A number of artists and writers have concerned themselves with the possibilities of utilising other senses in art making and representations. The Concordia Sensoria Research team at the Canadian Concordia University, Montreal, in their research project titled 'Beyond the aesthetic gaze - for an aesthetic of "other" senses', discovered that, in 1836, a French man called Theophile Thore theorised that 'one can express all of creation with perfumes as well as one can with line and colour'.<sup>91</sup> The Symbolists also believed in this theory when they created a synaesthetic interpretation of experiencing and interpreting the world. Their aim was to create a multi

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<sup>90</sup> Abdulla, Sara, Nature News service, *Armpits of the Rich and Famous* see <http://www.nature.com/nsu/98103/981203-7.html> 1998.

(last visited 8/2/04)

<sup>91</sup> Theophile T. *L'Art des Parfums* mentioned in 'Beyond the aesthetic gaze- for an aesthetics for the "other senses"' Concordia Sensoria Research Team (CONCERT) See [http://alcor.concordia.ca/senses/research\\_project.htm](http://alcor.concordia.ca/senses/research_project.htm) (last visited 12/12/03)



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sensorial experience that gave its audience a opportunity to become immersed within the work surrounded by diverse sensory stimuli.

Contemporary artists such as Ursitti are continuing these investigations by opening further sensory opportunities. In her exhibition titled *Bill-Scent*, Ursitti filled an empty space with the scent of sperm. In an accompanying artist's interview, she explains that she is intrigued by the way scents can trigger visual memories.<sup>92</sup> She goes on to remark that while the sense of smell has such a powerful effect on memory, we actually have little language for describing it beyond whether something smells 'good' or 'bad'.

Ursitti has developed a perfume based on her own body scent called Eau Clarie. At an exhibition held at the Fruit Market Gallery, Edinburgh (1999), the 'scent' was dispersed electronically into an enclosed booth. The audience reacted very strongly. In fact, Ursitti states, that 'had the reaction of the viewers been recorded, the piece could almost have been a scientific experiment'.<sup>93</sup>

My own work, like that of Ursitti, shows a strong scientific influence, in that my knowledge of science has assisted me in manipulating odours, and thereby guiding viewers' responses. Ursitti has ignored the usual forms of representation on offer, choosing instead other senses that are open to more imaginative readings. I have combined sweet smelling aromas with those considered abject, including sweat and blood, to assist in creating an intimate portrait of feminine embodiment.

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<sup>92</sup> Manby, C (1999), 'Smells Like' Interview with Ursitti in *Overground Issue IX*. See <http://www.vertebrae.co.uk/overground/og9/smells.html> (last visited 3/4/03)

<sup>93</sup> Manby, C. (1999)

## Chapter 5 The visual works submitted for Examination

As discussed in the first chapter, after reading Solnit I decided to make sculptures from contemporary fluids. Liquids defy boundaries and can run amok, disrupting order; they are capable of transgressive behaviour. As long as they exemplified the oppositional, semiotically loaded properties of desire and disgust, I proposed to use them in my sculptures.

Using the liquid mix previously described, I made a series of 'skins' and flesh-like lumps whose matrix is composed of solidified shampoo, a pearly liquid soaked in the appropriations of the virtuous, and its abject equal, equivalent amounts of my own used bath-water.



Fig 64.  
Anna Phillips  
*mortuary skin*, 2003, (sample).

I intended to make sculptures from this oddly formulated mix that could visually represent a psychical phenomena, the Imaginary Body. A body that exists outside the boundaries of the physical one, but is bound to the imaginary margins of its insides. I was not sure what form this Imaginary Body should take, but was convinced of its presence. I felt I could make some of the layers of its imaginary skin, by constructing and manipulating a substance that would allow passage through one surface and matter state to another, and so dissolve the boundary edges between the two.

Combining the fluids, I have created a series of art-objects that refer to a decorated skin surface, and that deliberately include the synthetic feminised odours of shampoo and my own body odour. The sculptures are composed

of both desirable and abject matter, with recognizable associations and attributes of similarity and opposition, as well as hesitation and familiarity. My hope is to create a unique medium that refers to the subjective feminine body. These liquid opposites are imbued with selected appropriations of popular cultural iconography.

The sculptures were constructed with the idea of the body in absentia, providing a formal visualisation and unique interpretation of the margins and edges of the intimate skin layers, and the outer external space. In *On longing*, theorist Susan Stewart, gives an analysis of the way in which everyday objects are animated in our thoughts to realise certain versions of the world. She discusses in her opening chapter how the body, as an object in space, presents a paradox of container and contained all at once. Thus our focus is continually on the boundaries or limits of the body. She reminds us that 'it is the openings, gaps and slits that offer surface visibility and entry into the interior of the body by allowing a sense of edge'.<sup>93</sup>



Fig. 65

Enfleurage, perfume extraction technique, Grasse, France, 1910.

The solidified skins I developed are capable of acting as aesthetic metaphors for the body's skin and flesh. The sculptural skin mimics real skin. Outer surface layers are soft, sweet-smelling and moist when young, only to become thickened and hardened with age.

The innermost layers, those below the substance's surface, refer to interiority and imaginary deposits of culturally constructed meanings. These solidified skins behave like the middle layer between the surface of real

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<sup>93</sup> Stewart, S. (1993) *On Longing – Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press) p. 104.



skin and the innermost layer of the outside world. They act as a potential space between the two, mapping the imaginary contours around the physical body. Their materiality and physicality refer to the presence of an absent body that is culturally and socially produced and ascribed with conservative values and signification.



Fig. 66  
Wedding dress designed by Beccaria, *Eternity*, 2001.

My constructed skins are tactile and plastic, seriously tough (resin strength) but are also capable of tissue parchment fragility and delicacy. They are disgusting and sticky to feel, yet, seductive and opulent to look at. They are both permeable and sealing and can be made faithful to the surface of another object, taking an exact replica of that surface.

The skins that I have created possess an odour. Just as western ideals of feminine beauty and appearance have been artificially constructed, so have I incorporated odours during the making process. I have manipulated and incorporated odours into my sculptures. This is distinctly opposed to popular culture, where the ideal society is deodorized. Most representations of women in electronic and photo-media, are odourless, scentless depictions of a certain type of woman and her acceptable behaviour. Popular images constantly reinforce social anxiety regarding the need for deodorisation and the rejection of the natural smelling body.



The submitted Examination work consists of ten sculptural pieces, each referring to embodiment of the Imaginary Feminine Body.

1) *cell membrane*



fig 67

Anna Phillips  
*cell membrane*, 2004.  
1.8metres diameter

This piece is situated at the entrance to the gallery and is made from a filmy membrane of the solidified substance that adheres to a plaster wall surface. This is the most fragile and ephemeral of all the pieces. I made the original version of this piece with gutter-water collected from outside my house after a rainy day. I wanted to create something beautiful and delicate, using substances that are considered useless and unimportant in our culture. The leftover hairs and bits of detritus found within its matrix act as a metaphor for the unwanted parts that reside on our skin surfaces and they had become part of the gutter water. The lace pattern visible on the surface of the membrane refers to the attraction of women's undergarments, and how the material used for this type of garment has become eroticised in patriarchal culture, turning skin into cloth and material into skin, dissolving the borders and edges between the two.

2) *red wallpaper*

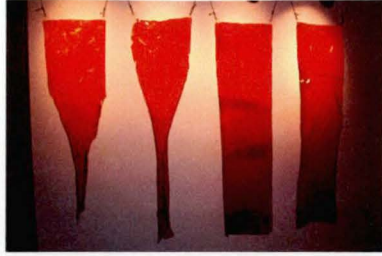


fig. 68

Anna Phillips

*red wallpaper*, 2004.

each skin 1900mm(h) x 480mm(w) x 1mm(d)

This is the first piece negotiated by the viewer in the space. I wanted to create a feminine space that conveyed the moment of bodily transgression between liquid and solid, visualising the grotesque in its rumpled skin folds and smelling of its unapologetic odours.

This sculpture refers to the constructed social feminine body, its passages, and the surrounding skin that contains and seals the body. Skin, both real and imaginary, filters information into and out of the body. Coded social messages become inscribed within its surfaces. The melting, dripping red wallpaper sheets refer to the sticky tackiness and the claustrophobic restrictions of domestic interior spaces and to the reputedly uncontrollable nature of women's biological functions and negative societal fears related to menstruation and blood stains. As the viewer passes by the suspended sheets, the wallpaper skin may by chance attach itself, temporarily, to their skin. This meeting of the skins, both real and artificial, could provoke a reaction similar to Julia Kristeva's description of psychological abjection.<sup>94</sup> The detached, inverted sculptural skin, composed of elements of both dead and organic matter, connecting by chance with the viewer's skin, allows the opportunity to recognize the immediacy and the proximity of the grotesque body, a feature of the transforming Imaginary Body.

As previously noted, Didier Anzieu discusses, in his text *The Skin Ego*,<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Kristeva, J. (1982) quoted by I. Tyler, in her essay 'Skin tight: Celebrity, Pregnancy and Subjectivity', see S. Ahmed & J. Stacey (eds) *Thinking through the Skin*, (London, New York: Routledge) pp. 69-83.

<sup>95</sup> Anzieu, D. (1989) *The Skin Ego: a Psychoanalytical Approach to the Self*, (New Haven: Yale University Press) pp. 1-20.

the idea that the Imaginary Body is composed of sacs and pockets I wanted to construct my own version of these imaginary floppy organic uterine-shaped pouches. In a previous role, as a very nervous student midwife, I had the experience of delivering a bloodied babe's head as it passed up, and out of the birth canal. (See my Appendix D for full account). The shock of seeing and feeling something so fleshy and visceral yet, unrecognisable at the same time, was an incredible experience. With this moment strongly in my mind, I wanted to convey a sense of familiarity, coupled with a sense of disgust and hesitation when the viewer passes *red wallpaper*.

As noted Mary Douglas refers to the margins of the body as dangerous places. What is both inside and outside of the body is taboo in popular culture because of its ambiguous and uncontrollable nature.

### 3) *microscopic samples*

#### a) *pupae*



fig. 69  
Anna Phillips  
*pupae*, 2004.  
each form 80mm in length.

Technology and science are continually creating new ways of relating to and controlling the body. My intention is to refer to current scientific technologies and artificial devices that are used to manipulate fertilisation or interfere with biological, 'natural' functions of women's bodies. By creating my own imaginary 'scientific' aesthetic I feel I have taken authority over my developed organic and synthetic substance. I aimed to create a mutated hybrid that refers to its own system of origins and beginnings.



b) *bud*

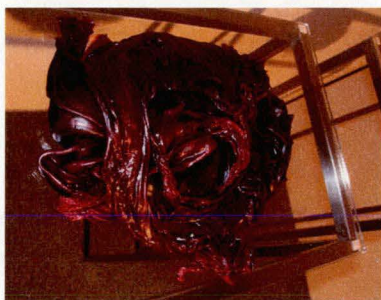


fig. 70  
Anna Phillips  
*bud*, 2004.  
variable dimensions.

This piece refers to the microscopic beginnings of the body, but removed from any scientific sterility and the usual clinical situation. It is an artistic explanation of mitosis, the replication and duplication of embryonic cells; a sticky 'no frills' account of the beginnings of life, with shampoo albumen and translucent plasma; an imaginary account of the origin of the 'virtuous'.

c) *plastic shampoo bottle tile orifices*



fig. 71  
Anna Phillips  
*plastic shampoo tile orifices*, 2004.  
250mm(h) x 780mm(w) x 40mm(d)

Following Grosz's idea of turning the body inside out, I made a plaster cast of my own lips, which I then pressed into clay. Next, with the assistance of the vacuum-moulding machine, I created plastic shampoo bottle 'bathroom tiles' from the clay negative. The orifices that I created refer to the constructed and social nature of the feminine body and the way that artificial substances, contained in mutable plastic, can masquerade as a type of entrance and exit into and out of the Imaginary Feminine Body.



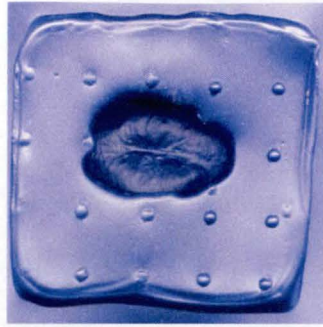


Fig. 72  
Anna Phillips  
(detail) *plastic shampoo bottle tile orifices*, 2004.  
each tile 80mm in width.

This plastic tile orifice takes delight in providing a more provocative alternative to the usual array of conservative images used to render the female body. Recognizable bathroom features, such as geometric tile patterns, suggest the location of this work. Domestic interior spaces imprint their dignified surfaces into our being; our behaviour is modified and controlled in these spaces. The bathroom is an important, private space for ritualised feminine behaviour and gestures. The plastic shampoo bottle orifices capture the precocious pout, as well as other grotesque facial poses, enlisted whilst applying make-up and facial beauty aids. I deliberately chose colourful shampoo plastic for the orifice tiles. Powerful messages of persuasion are incorporated into shampoo bottle colours, not only to promote and market its product, but also to endorse a more abstract reference to desirability and feminine sex appeal. The malleability of Shampoo bottle plastic refers to its product's ability to transform, and establishes the difference between itself and other varieties of shampoo bottle.

d) *red cell*



fig. 73  
Anna Phillips  
*red cell*, 2004.  
88mm(h) x 120mm(w) x 120(d)

This sample was created when ‘left-overs’ were added to a central compote and left to set. I realised that once the skin had set on any particular mixture, it was ‘out of my hands’; its surface was impossible to alter. I liked this discovery because it made me realise that the substance had its own mind, and was resistant to some of my intentions.

4) *mauve skin*



fig. 74  
Anna Phillips  
*mauve skin*, 2004.  
3000mm in length. Variable width.

This piece refers to a feminine skin surface, which popular culture dictates should be smooth, supple and unscarred. This sculptural skin mimics real skin in that it too, despite advertising testimonials, applications and promises, becomes wrinkled and sour-smelling with time. This piece is an attempt to provide a space that relates to the inner, hidden body as well as the decorated surface. It is organic and biological and mimics a real anatomical mass that has inner and outer surfaces. The point of

intersection between the hidden interior and the exposed exterior is a skin-like slit that separates and joins these two surfaces. The outer surface of the *mauve skin* is majestic.

It is decorated with emblematic imagery of fecundity and youthfulness, embossed flowery patterns and swirly motifs; smelling initially of sweet flowery perfumes, after a period of time, this will be overtaken by a cloying sweet odour, related to decomposition.

From the concealed and private interior body, vapours emerge and diffuse out into the visible and publicly scrutinized exterior. Mandy Aftel in *Essence and Alchemy – a Book of Perfume* wrote about the relationship between odour and memory; ‘These memories from the unconscious remind us of what we are dragging behind unawares. But, even though we may have no distinct idea of it, we feel vaguely that our past remains present to us’.<sup>96</sup> The inner space created by the mauve skin is my attempt to reconnect with past memory associations and personal feelings regarding my own body. I intended the mauve skin to be quite overwhelming for the viewer. Its surface resembles a membranous shroud that has enveloped a hidden form.

### 5) *screen*



fig. 75  
Anna Phillips  
detail of *screen*, 2004.  
1600mm(h) x450mm(w) x1mm(d)

This piece refers to the attributes of feminine skin in popular culture. Real skin, when stretched out, measures about 2 metres square. The framed piece of sculptural skin acts as a metaphor for youthful taut skin and the grotesque artifices used to retain it. As Bartky suggests, we see our bodies in parts. It is this

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<sup>96</sup> Aftel, M. (2001) *Essence and Alchemy – a Book of Perfume*, (London : Bloomsbury) p. 78.



segmentation and separation of the body that I am interested in exaggerating and displaying with this sculpture.

6) *blu rinse skins*



fig. 76  
Anna Phillips  
*blu rinse skins*, 2004.  
each skin 1800mm(l) x430mm(w) x1.5mm(d)

I envisaged a darkened quiet location for ten bolts of suspended scented blue/purple skins, which criss-cross downwards from the ceiling. I intended to create a look that was a combination of the mezzanine at Liberty's of London and a catafalque in an old cathedral. The viewer would be able to walk underneath the scented languid drapes. I wanted to expose the viewer to the possibilities of being underneath or inside the sculpture at the same time. These drooping skins commenced at the highest point of the gallery and flowed in a downward trajectory to the floor. Lighting was very important to this sculpture. As one passed underneath the illuminated suspended skins, the viewer, if looking upwards, might notice the captured moment of the transforming substance between liquidity and solidification. Each poured layer of the shampoo bathwater substance mix melted into the preceding one, resulting in a vivid layering of colour and odour, alluding to depth and surface texture simultaneously.

Inspired by Antoni Gaudi's method of calculating curves and angles for his cathedrals, I intended to achieve the same elegant sweep by allowing the individual skins to each create its own curving arch by its suspended heaviness. (See Appendices E for further discussion on Antoni Gaudi architectural construction methods.)



7) *luxe skin*

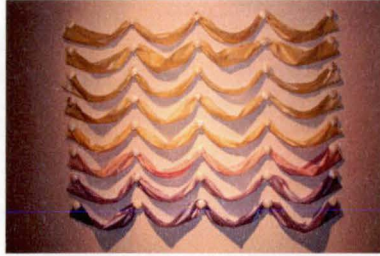


fig. 77  
Anna Phillips  
*luxe skins*, 2004.  
3000mm(l) x 200mm(w) x 1.5mm(d)

With this piece I wanted to connect the more luxurious and traditional associations of the feminine with the pearly materiality and allure of skin.

I made eight pearlescent ivory draped skin swags, which have strong associations to secret feminine folds and hidden interiors. The languid surface is tactile, smooth, and odourised with sweet feminine skin creams and oils. The shampoo bottle container has been transformed into pearly shells that function as deluxe curtain knobs, suspending the imaginary skins. The shampoo bottle shells refer to the goddess Aphrodite (Venus), who was associated with the sea. There is also a cheeky suggestion that I surpassed the beauty of natural shells by creating a superior imitation, assisted by the generous mutability of plastic.

As with the exhibition as a whole, theatrical effects were important. The classical droop of the curtain swag referred to the constructed artifice and stillness of middle-class, English nineteenth century domestic space. Each layer of skin reinforced the notion of concealment and disclosure.

8) *cell mass*

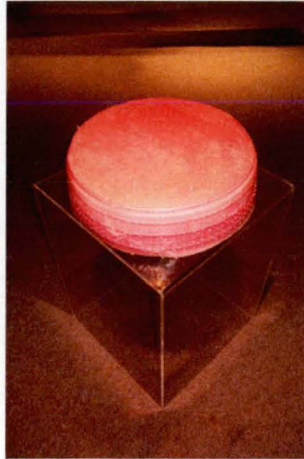


fig. 78  
Anna Phillips  
*cell mass*, 2004.  
290mm(h) x 500mm(d)

I collected my daily bath water over a 4-week period and duly added it to an equal volume of shampoo to make a solidified mass that reminded me of the human cell. The human cell contains all the parts and necessary elements that make us unique human beings.

I wanted to make enough mixture to equal my own body weight, or close enough to it. As the layers in the piece grew upwards, it appeared 'jelly like', all wobbly and vulnerable, only to become hardened and thickened with age. Interested viewers often ask me does the work last? When discussing the permanence of any of these sculptures, I remark that a considerable degree of preservatives and chemicals has been added to the substance, so that the work has a high chance of remaining intact, without any erosion or damage. However, it is equally capable of altering its own appearance and materiality over time, which adds to the sense of transience and uniqueness.

9) *lipstick skins*

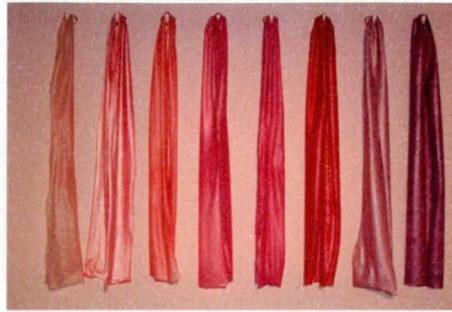


fig. 79  
Anna Phillips  
*lipstick skins*, 2004.  
150mm(h) x 200mm(w) x 1.5mm(d)

I made a range of skins, each referring to particular lipstick colour and its anthropomorphic associations. I love reading make-up catalogues about products that purport to have essential and necessary connections with parts of the feminine body. These products are identified with names associated with the body, for example, pink nude, fleshy peach, skin bronze. This strategy of connecting body parts to a specific product not only increases brand recognition, but also helps reinforce an intimate association and necessary link between specialist products and a body part.

10) *peek*



Fig. 80  
Anna Phillips  
*peek*, 2004.  
178mm(h) x 1.5mm(w) x 1.5mm(d)

This sculpture consists of two suspended skins, each attached top and bottom to stainless steel shower railings. The challenge to visualize Grosz's

## Chapter 5 The visual works submitted for Examination

'inside outside body' provided the impetus for the making of this sculpture based on her explanation regarding the surface of the skin being the important loci of exchange between the outside and inside body. The sticky folds and slits that define the edges of the purple/blue sheets are intended as visual metaphors for the breaks and splits in the feminine body. The skins are embossed with a textured wallpaper trace. I intended to construct this piece so that its form appeared recognizable from familiar feminine spaces. Sweet and flowery odours exuded from the cavity of the sculpture. Daring to look between, or peeling apart the overlapping skins, the viewer would be almost overwhelmed by its cloying vapors, and experience 'the inside turned outside'.



### Chapter 6. Conclusion

I had embarked on a mission to discover Solnit's 'mid-point', the place she identified as the site of a new feminine aesthetic, one that presents an imaginative depiction of women as an alternative to the usual forms of feminine representation on offer. Following Solnit's 'clues' I explored existing western art history and popular cultural iconography and ideologies hoping to find this middle spot to assist me in visualising a more 'real' type of feminine representation and embodiment. I discovered that it is not so easy to find the middle of an intangible mass, or locate the spot where the disgusting and the desirable meet, at the same time, the spot which, as Solnit claims, possesses an undivided corporeality.

However, I did find a new approach to the Feminine Aesthetic and my sculptures are a visualisation of this investigation. By conceiving the layers of my own feminine body, both mental and sensory, I have visualised an imaginary surface that identifies both biological and cultural constructs within its skin layers and membranes. I have developed this approach by combining an oppositional, transformative and transgressive liquid, shampoo, a seemingly unimportant object of consumption, with the waste by-product of a personal experience, my used bath-water.

The resulting substance expands the definition and the possibilities of the unrepresented feminine body by allowing a visualisation of its surface layers and deposits. The transformation of this liquid substance, from liquid to solid, reveals the possibilities of what lies 'inside' the surface, unlike conventional readings which concentrate on the exterior, and literally go no further than skin deep. I have developed a substance that delights in unexpected outcomes, with pheromonal confusion and sensory ambiguities of feminine embodiment.

Thus, it is possible to demonstrate a depiction of the feminine that allows a more insightful experience for the viewer and that delves beyond existing embodiments and representations. This developed substance re-affirms the importance of the feminine body and emphasises the fact that the body and its layers continue to be the source of our feelings and consciousness; it also facilitates debate with the intention of

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

informing feminine discourse. This ongoing debate needs to be kept open rather than closed off by putative solutions, which restrict further dialogues. The sculptures that I have developed aim to facilitate such discourse and to suggest further avenues that might add validation to the personal experiences of all women.

I would like to acknowledge the many women artists whose work provided inspiration and context for the project, and particularly those who were discussed in chapter four. As a result of my commitment to this research project, my understanding and awareness of the topic has greatly expanded, dispelling many prejudices and misconceptions that I held at the commencement of the research. I feel I have gained much valuable insight, realising there are numerous approaches beyond existing conventions that may allow us to discover an alternative feminine representation.

There is a rich seam of artists who have always made art about self-representation and embodiment. Historically, many of these women artists have fared poorly in the art world, being far less known, documented and collected, than their masculine contemporaries. But, with their intelligent art practices, they have contributed to what Solnit called this 'new aesthetic'. The writings of Rebecca Solnit have been pivotal to my research. Her words inspired me to make my own discoveries and assisted me in the making of a new body of work related to this topic.

The artists deserve a comprehensive study and it was not possible in this paper to outline a greater number of their works. With the advent of new technologies, there has been a certain 'democratisation' of art exhibitions in that, artists today have more visual opportunities to display their work, allowing it to be accessed and assessed by a larger audience than a few decades ago. However, since most of the work that I have been interested in, relies on a sensory interaction with the viewer, some of the impact of that work is diminished on a two-dimensional video screen, which allows no transfer of information other than purely visual or auditory. Maybe in the future, technologies will take into consideration the importance of other senses and discover how to transmit odours and other tactile or sensory information.

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

I came to art-making from a science/nursing background, having been brought up in the school of 'measuring, checking and recording'. As reassuring as these processes became, I have always been fascinated by the unpredictability and the uniqueness of the body. How it worked, and what it looked like on the 'inside'. After engaging in this project, I have discovered that it is possible to combine the curiosity of my first interest, with the unrestricted freedom of the second and, like the artist Ursitti, as a result of this fusion, found a way to express myself that is related to this topic.

In my initial investigations of this topic I believed that science and art stood opposed to each other, each denying the advantage of shared resources and experience. But as my knowledge and understanding of the topic grew I no longer felt constrained by empirical conventions and scientific principles, I had the courage to make up my own rules, taking the exciting leap into the unpredictable places that this research project allowed. By combining science and art practices I have drawn on the strengths of both fields and used them to my advantage. The outcome has resulted in the generation of further possibilities for visualising feminine embodiment and finding a way to Solnit's Exquisite Aesthetic.

The aim of the project was to expand the definition of feminine representation, and open up acceptance of difference, rather than rely on perpetual one-dimensional copies of the images of femininity offered up in popular culture. These developed surfaces and skins allow the viewer opportunities to experience feminine embodiment at a subjective rather than a literal level. The materiality of this developed imaginary substance gives definition to the unexpected, the unrepresented, and to the unconscious state of being female.

The re-visioning and the re-affirming of the feminine body became a possibility once I realised how to decode the cultural messages inscribed upon my own skin, to challenge these pervasive disciplines and practices, and to explore as yet unimagined transformations of being. At present I envisage pursuing further work relating to subjective embodiment and transformative materials.

## Appendices

### Appendix A

I had been nursing a young man who had been involved in a very serious car accident. He was crucially ill, and for a week he bravely hung on to life. He could not talk because of life support equipment, only managing to communicate, after a fashion, by squeezing my hand and blinking his eyes. I, in my naivety, thought he would improve, sit up, and 'get well'. I even assumed that his split-open body would neatly seal over like invisible mending. I imagined looking after him throughout his convalescence. However, when I returned to work after several day's leave, I approached his bed only to find it empty; he was no longer there. This shocking discovery was made even worse by the realisation that his body imprint was still visible on the bed. Outlined in the disturbed sheets and discarded folds, I could still make out his presence. The poor man had died a few hours before, and they had just removed his body to the morgue. My fingers traced across a twisted sheet that had bunched up and lay in an abandoned mound on top of his mattress, contorted into that twisted position when the corpse was pulled across the bed. Another sheet hung like flapping skin jowls over the bed edge. The plastic coated mattress seemed exhausted and resigned to its wasted effort. Sinking my face into the hollow of a pillow I could still make out the smell of his sweat mixed with the odour of hospital soap. They came back soon after to strip the bed bare, unceremoniously dumping his used sheets into a shapeless linen bag, spraying disinfectant over anything that he might have touched or breathed on. The falling droplets sanitised any whiffs of odour that may have permeated from his skin and uncontrolled orifices, and that had lingered long after his body had been removed.



### Appendix B

In my Masters Research Degree 1999, 'Shampoo Mythology: the object, its meaning, its influences', I identified five different kinds of shampoo bottles and outlined a proposed typology that included the Virtuous, the Femme Fatale, the Natural, the Scientific and the Mechanical bottle. These types had little to do with hair care,

but were based on the presentation of the production of everything to do with types of feminine representation and experience.

The following extract is paraphrased from my Masters Research Degree on the shampoo bottle and its contents. Shampoo was originally developed as a detergent in response to the 1939-1945-war. It was intended for the removal of heavy-duty grease from fabric. However, by the end of the Second World War, shampoo had transformed from a sachet of white powder into a pearly liquid icon. Its purpose now established solely as a hair cleaner. The market for personal toiletries and beauty products flourished during the post-war period. These substances were advertised as new and modern, marketed not just as hygiene products but as essential tools for personal beautification. The shampoo bottle is a mass-produced object that has acquired its status as a fetish by presenting itself as an object of desire and availability. Its forms are soft, yielding and enticing and like other mass-produced objects, the shampoo bottle forever defies singular ownership.

In mass culture, a shift occurred in the status of the 'real thing' to the copy. Simulacra are now established realities. Women consumers are seasonally confronted with mutating shampoo brands where a choice has to be made before purchase. This selection, which arguably may appear to be simply monetary, is more likely to be a reflection of individual subconscious libidinal feelings related to the Ego, self-worth and desire. The language of shampoo advertising and its imagery is designed to arouse subconscious desires, and awareness of brand difference. Insistent whiney voice-overs repeat mantra-like lines such as, 'you're worth it' and 'you deserve it' which psychically stimulate narcissistic feelings of self worth and the inevitable commodity fetishism that results from an overpowering need to possess commodities.

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Shampoo's major ingredient is called a **surfactant**, its primary function is to dissolve grease. And yet, nowhere on the shampoo bottle is grease ever mentioned. Grease is a visible record of our 'natural selves', a reminder of our lard-like insides and sweaty glands. The shampoo bottle and its contents are deliberately coded as feminine. Its advertising presentation and imagery are aimed at offering women consumers the potential to transform, suggesting the acquisition of the desirable but artificially constructed feminine body.

Shampoo offers the user an intimate and unique relationship. Its only reason for existence lies in the moment when it is activated into a frothy mass on the head. Shampoo is marketed as a composite of feminised desire, ('I want what she's got') promoted as a magical substance, ('it won't happen overnight, but it will happen') and with assertions of health-giving powers to restore organically dead hair. Shampoo is packaged with promises of orgasmic strength and hair swishing satisfaction. The most alluring properties of shampoo, however, are its mutability, formlessness and anointing qualities. Once shampoo and soap dissolve their substance onto the skin and hair, they become like a slippery liquid veneer, changing into a froth of indignant bubbles at the water/grease interface. For the 'new and busy woman' shampoo is marketed as an affordable personal indulgence, imbued with a kind of authority, complete with testimonials regarding its rapid (or overnight) transformative possibilities and guaranteed to catch the attention of the insistent masculine gaze.

I was fascinated to discover just how advertising successfully manages to transform a potent but basically boring chemical surfactant, into appropriate imagery associated with ancient mythologies through its presentation; then, deliver it up as a powerful and indispensable iconographic fluid, which is used as an agent of social control.

Somewhere along this frothy interface between utility and desire consumers appear to have metaphorically got soap in their eyes. It is usual to suggest that this soapy state is the result of persuasive advertising. I feel however, that the relationship between shampoo and its users is far more complex than the above explanation offers. We are left in doubt as to why consumers are beguiled by the persuasive powers of

## **Appendices**

clever marketing alone. Consumers appear to ignore, consciously or unconsciously, the utility function of shampoo, whilst at the same time, perceiving their own body secretions and odours as negative. Rather, they identify with shampoo's socially ascribed feminine representations and acceptable boundaries, narcissistic rewards and unrealistic promises.

### Appendix C

In a tatty old 50s women's fashion and beauty magazine, which I later carelessly threw away in sheer indignation, after having read it I found an article on how to obtain the 'perfect skin'. Beauty creams, glycerine salves and compotes based on animal fat were compared looking for their beautifying ability and potential to transform. The article's tone was authoritative, yet, reproachful, intimate and accusatory. *Do you have good skin?* It quizzed its unsure readers. In its conclusion, associations were drawn between personal hygiene and acceptable feminine behaviour.

The social consequences of unwashed skin, body odour, and dirty hair in fifties culture were underlined, reinforcing personal shame or embarrassment about the natural body. Dermatological illustrations highlighted the outcomes of default of responsibility and reinforced anxieties. According to the author's taxonomy of admirable skin qualities, a high-ranking attribute is allure. Highly admired skin glows, reflecting luminosity and radiance, reinforcing the classical connection of feminine beauty to Venus, the Roman name for the Greek Aphrodite. The author of the magazine article saw fit to beseech readers to strictly adhere to traditional moral principles, and adapt to patriarchal beliefs.

I was fascinated to see such a blatant example of skin propaganda and paranoia aimed at women consumers. The article reinforced values and boundaries of acceptable feminine appearance in that 1950s period. Qualities such as goodness, purity and compliance were promoted as merits to be rewarded and viewed as good behaviour and, like good skin, 'proper' behaviour deserved to be complimented and encouraged. Today's skin care products focus on the actual skin surface, and its ability to defer or reverse ageing. Wrapped up in sleek testimonials offering supposed good health and well-being, the advertising deception is still evident while, simultaneously, the coercive messages remain. Such skin-care products promise visible change in user appearance and identity. Their chemical ingredients offer light-reflecting properties that assist in the construction of translucency, radiance and skin brilliance. These products offer a youthful skin that is blemish and hair free. Other envy-producing trade-offs are promised for adherence to punishing diets, exercise and



## Appendices

skin care regimes. *Be the envy of all your female friends.* The marketing of contemporary skin care products continues the convention of tapping into western women's fears of ageing and the disapproval of sagging skin. In a youth-obsessed culture the controlled, sealed and toned body is rewarded; its owner compensated for acceptance and conformity to this idealised vision of femininity. The notion that the body is akin to a sculptural medium that can be altered and interfered with is encouraged. Physical and imaginary transformation is available to consumers.

## Appendices

### Appendix D

Years later, I can still recollect the sharp sense of urgency I felt, as my sweating hands fumbled to insert themselves into hospital latex whilst assisting in an emergency delivery at the Maternity Hospital I trained at. My probing fingers could not find their matching mates, and yellowed indignant digits contorted into a powdered fist of agitation.

I had seconds to puncture a constricting caul, the unbroken placental membrane, whose smothering tightness over the babe's face was preventing any chance of taking breath. Over what seemed an eternity, I managed to pull apart the adhered skin layers of the placenta, which had by then compressed the babe's face into a purple smudge. I had to break the skin surface with my fingers. Indescribable relief followed as gushing uterine waters splattered down my legs. What seemed inaccessible, unknown and abstract just seconds before, came bulging out towards me, in a warm watery sac, its contents now suddenly, and irreversibly at hand.

## Appendices

### Appendices E

I was very inspired by the work of Antoni Gaudi, and his use of organic and anatomical features (such as the skin webbing between fingers and toes), to create the visual forms for his architecture. Whilst Gaudi was male; it was his construction methods that interested me.

I studied photographs of his work, in particular the devices he used to assist in the construction of his parabolic arches. He suspended weighted sheets to calculate their individual gravitational pull and drop. With this information, Gaudi planned the angles and curves of the vaulted chambers he was designing.<sup>94</sup>

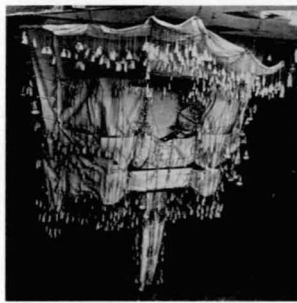


Fig. 81

Antoni Gaudi, preliminary model for *Guell* Chapel, Barcelona (1898-1914).

<sup>94</sup> Sweeney, J.J. & J. Sert, (1970), *Antoni Gaudi*, (London: Architectural Press) pp 86-87.

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## Curriculum Vitae

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### Education

2004	Awarded Doctor of Philosophy, pending corrections to submitted Exegesis.
1999	Commenced Doctor of Philosophy in Art, University of Tasmania.
1998	Master of Fine Art (Research), University of Tasmania.
1996	Bachelor of Fine Arts, (1 <sup>st</sup> Class Honours), University of Tasmania.
1988	Bachelor of Applied Science, Tasmanian State Institute of Technology, Launceston.

### Employment

1997-03	Associate Lecturer/Tutor, Sculpture Department, Tasmanian School of Art at Hobart, University of Tasmania.
1998-01	Program Coordinator, Fine Arts Gallery, University of Tasmania.

### Solo Exhibitions and Interventions

2004	<i>Hem</i> , sculptural installation, Kelly's Garden, Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart.
2002	<i>Making Money</i> An Intervention in the Numismatics room, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.
2000	<i>Doily</i> , Parliament House Gardens, Hobart.
1999	Artist in Residence, Schwarzkopf Professional, Hamburg, Germany.
1998	<i>Extra Body</i> , Contemporary Art Services of Tasmania, Hobart.

### Selected Group Exhibitions

2004	<i>Group Material</i> , curated by Michael Edwards, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.
2004	<i>Intravenus 3</i> Carnegie Gallery, Hobart City Council, Hobart.
2003	<i>Haven</i> , as part of <i>10 days on the Island</i> , Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart. touring including Devonport regional Gallery & Craft Victoria, Flinders Lane, Melbourne.
2002	Academy of the Arts Inaugural Opening, Inveresk, Launceston.
2002	Southern Wine and Sculptures Route - Craigow, Richmond <i>Tree Doily</i> .
2002	<i>Where Have You Been?</i> 1980-2000 Australian Contemporary Art, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.
2001	<i>Sculpture by the Sea</i> , Bondi Beach, Sydney, N.S.W.
	<i>Doily 2</i> Sculpture by the Sea, Port Arthur, Tasman Peninsula, Tasmania.
2001	<i>Island Postcards 10 Days on the Island</i> . State Library, Hobart.
	<i>Intra Venus</i> , Moonah Arts Centre, Hobart.
	<i>Hooked</i> : Crochet from Australia and New Zealand, Queensland Craft Council, Brisbane.



- 1999      *The Empty Plastic Shampoo Bottle Mandala*, Constitution Dock, Hobart Fringe Festival.
- 1996      *No Vacancies*, Temporary Gallery Project, Elizabeth Street, Hobart.
- 1995      *Blundstone Contemporary Art Prize*, Queen Victoria Art Gallery and Museum, Launceston.

#### **Awards and Commissions**

- 2004      Visual Arts Residency at the Cape Barren Island School, Cape Barren Island.
- 2004      Mountain Sculpture Trail, Hobart Rivulet, Hobart.
- 2001      Awarded the 2002 McCulloch Studio Residency, Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris  
APA Scholarship: Doctor of Philosophy Art.
- 1999      Schwarzkopf Professional: Artist in Residence, Hamburg, Germany.
- 1997      Emerging Artist commission: Contemporary Art Services of Tasmania.  
2nd prize in 3-D, National Tertiary Art Prize, Woollongong University.  
Best Female Tertiary art student, National Tertiary Art Prize, Woollongong University.

#### **Committees**

- Salamanca Arts Centre, Sub-Executive Committee.
- Plimsoll Gallery Committee, University of Tasmania.

#### **Community Arts Projects**

- 2001      ClarendonVale Mosaic Project.
- 2000      Bellerive Community Arts Centre.

#### **Selected Publications**

- 2004      'Group Material', text by Philip Watkins, *ArtLink*, (Australia), Vol. 24, no. 2  
pp. 84-85.
- 2004      'Tasmanian Artists in Paris', illustrations and text by Nathalie Latham,  
*Island* magazine. Dec/January.
- 2003      Murray, K. 'Archer takes the Devil out of Tasmania', *Art Monthly*, (Australia) pp.4-7  
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- 2001      *Art Monthly* (Australia) photographic image of *Doily 2*, in situ Port Arthur  
'Sculpture by the Sea' 2001 taken by Jack Bett.
- 1999      *Schwarzkopf Dialog*, 'All About Anna', 3/1999.
- 1999      'Shampoo Mythology – the object, its meaning, its influences'  
[www.sfca.uni.melb.edu.au/useabuse.htm](http://www.sfca.uni.melb.edu.au/useabuse.htm)