

**The Metaphorical Value of Lace in Contemporary Art:
The Transformative Process of a Practice-Led Inquiry**

Joy Buttress

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Abstract

This thesis examines lace as a metaphor in contemporary art, comprising a practice-led inquiry based on the lace archive of Nottingham Trent University. Lace is placed in the context of creative art practice to establish an overview and understanding of the multifarious associations used to articulate ideas and concepts.

This study explores the integration of lace themes into my current art practice while adopting methods of research that reflect on and challenge the tacit knowledge already present in my creative process. An action research methodology is implemented, introducing reflective activities to question my concept development and instigate change. Case studies are used to gain a deeper understanding of how and why the application of lace themes and metaphors are present in contemporary art. The research process has a cyclical form in that my art practice is a case study that informs and enriches my creative process.

A theoretical inquiry is established, contributing to a philosophical framework built around ideas that encompass lace and the body, addressing the reappropriation from a fabric that once signified only wealth and status to a material that now adds a sexual charge to garments through the relationship it has with skin.

The theoretical and metaphorical understanding of lace gained as part of this inquiry is clearly defined through the documented conception and manufacture of a new body of artwork, demonstrating the transformation of my practice through academic research. Artworks were developed that explored the emotive space between historical lace pattern and the surface of the skin with an aim to translate the ambiguity of lace while reflecting multiple layers of opposing themes.

The artworks produced were displayed in a solo show entitled Lacuna in February 2012 at the Bonington Gallery, Nottingham Trent University.

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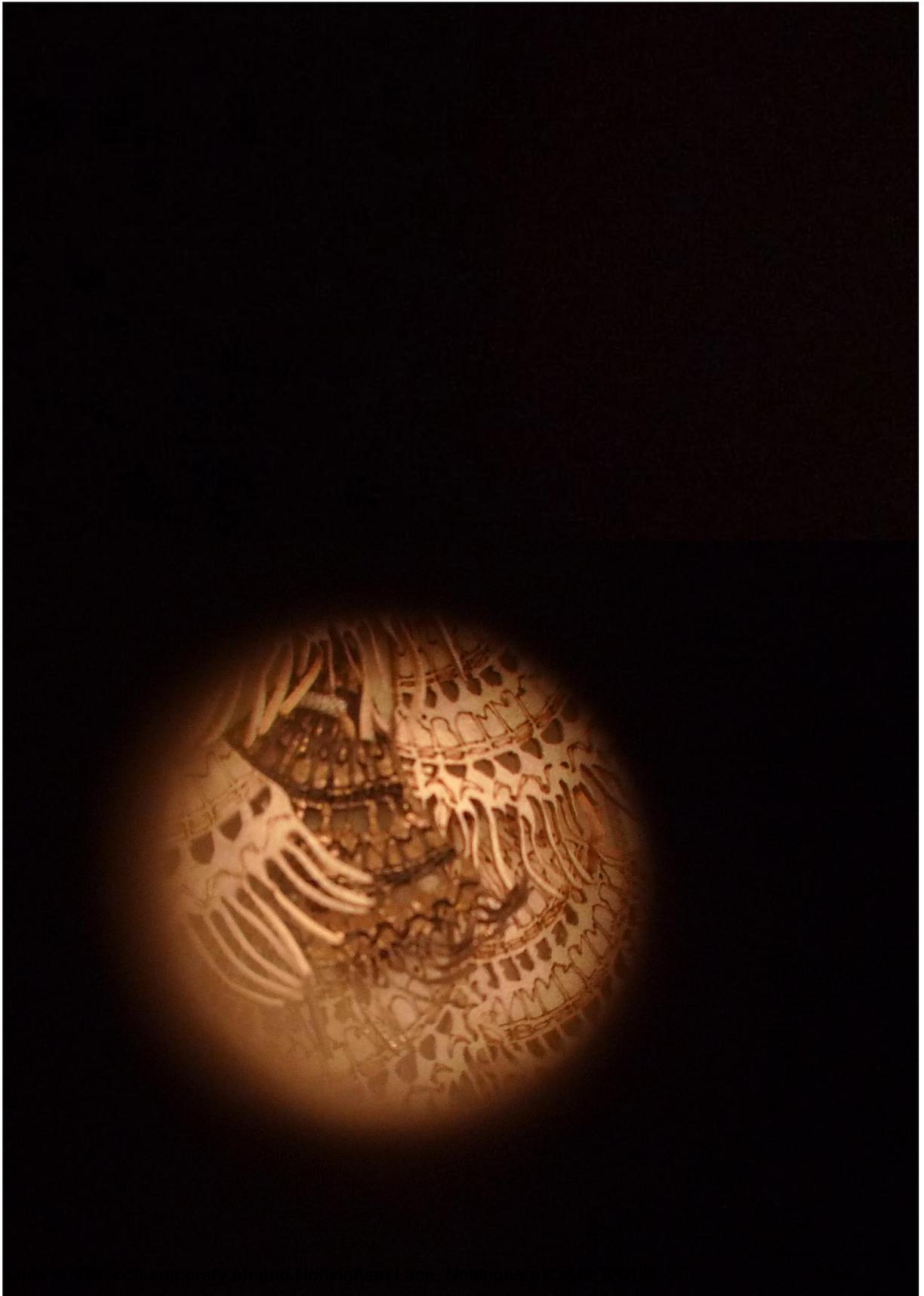


Figure 1: Joy Buttress, *Lacuna*, 2012.

Introduction

If you take a magnifying glass and look at a piece of hand-made lace, you see a mesh of delicately intertwining threads. To say this is not to say much, but if this inspection incorporates the viewer's knowledge of the process that brought the lace into being, the effect on the observer of getting up close to this material can transform their understanding of it. The scale and intricacy of the patterns of thread transforms abstract knowledge of the time, patience and pain that went into making a piece of lace into something more visceral and deeply felt. I write this from personal experience. These thoughts had never entered my practice as an artist before that 'magnifying glass moment', even though I had primarily worked with textiles and the integrated processes associated with craft. Lace fabric captures for me an intrinsic beauty, fragility, delicacy of line and an innovation of craftsmanship that I have not experienced with any other fabric. When I look past the sumptuous exterior and think more deeply about the hidden meanings and associations of lace, a darker side of inequality, exploitation and sexualisation reveals itself. This discordant relationship becomes a focus that influences my practice-led research and theoretical understanding throughout this study.

This inquiry set out to investigate the metaphorical value of lace in contemporary art through my own creative process and the practice of others. My research began in the Nottingham Trent University lace archive, a vast collection of artefacts primarily concerned with machine made lace. The collection had been closed since 2003 and only one PhD study (Brompton, 2002) has drawn on it until now. This thesis maps my exploration and immersion into a historical lace archive and the transformation of my practice as an artist brought about through the application of theoretical research and academic methods that introduced reflection as part of my concept development.

My initial interest lay in the vast diversity of the complex open work structure of lace and the delicate and intricate patterns and motifs that constructed this intensely decorative fabric. Fabrics that we define as lace share the property that the material is as important as the *immaterial* - holes play an integral part in forming the fabric (Earnshaw, 1985; Mason, 1994; Shepherd, 2003). Rosemary Shepherd, in her *Lace Classification System* (2003) for The Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia, suggests that a definition of lace must be "unambiguous" and must encompass all forms and constructions. She defines lace as "a decorative openwork fabric in which the pattern of the spaces is as important as the solid areas" (Shepherd, 2003). This

definition has been used in this research when understanding and determining a lace fabric.

It was important for me to establish an understanding of the cultural aspects and the multiple applications and associations connected with lace, and not just become visually seduced by the vast display of lace found in the collection. Lace has played a historically important role in both a domestic setting (dressing homes) and in clothing (adorning bodies). When incorporated into clothing it is associated with a diverse and paradoxical display of purity, obedience and seduction often symbolised and defined by colour and encompassing royal endorsements, ecclesiastical dress and sensuous lingerie. White lace has often been used to reflect virtue and the religious rituals of commitment through gowns worn for christening and marriage while black lace has been tarnished with the veil of death and the subversive sexualisation of the female body. These diverse and multifarious characteristics of lace interested and challenged me to look more closely at lace as a fabric whose ambiguity creates an interesting balance of opposing themes.

My initial study of lace provided a vast subject area with many potential avenues, so it was important to establish limitations on the research and to determine a scope that could be adequately explored with clarity and understanding and which could contribute to the development of my practice. I initially became interested in theories that reflected on the early distinctions of women's dress and fashionable attire, starting with that of Thorstein Veblen (1994), who was among the first to reflect on social culture at the turn of the twentieth century, determining the new 'leisure class' and their conspicuous consumption that included clothing. While studying historical literature on dress it became clear that garments at this time incorporated expensive lace, displaying an exemption from manual labour and an elitist show of wealth. George Simmel was also observing social trends at this time, including clothing and dress. I was drawn to his essay entitled 'adornment' (Frisby & Featherstone, 2000) where I gained a new awareness of the potential metaphorical power and importance of the interconnection between the positioning of objects and clothing in relation to the body. This became a pivotal moment for me and I began working on ideas around the structure of lace that leads to the revealing and concealing of the skin. I was also interested in the notion that the openwork structure of lace suggests the intimate act of undressing when worn as a single layer on the body. I decided to explore the private and unspoken connection that lace has with the female form and the social changes that happened to transform the partnership and association between the body, clothing and lace.

When I investigated more closely the history of dress it was evident that the socio-historical changes in the mid-twentieth century, particularly the changing role of women, led to a dramatic transformation in fashion; dress began to openly reveal and expose women's bodies (Wolf, 1991; Entwistle, 2000; Arnold, 2001). It appears that the fashion industry recognised lace as a fabric that – through its open work structure – could contribute to the disclosing and eroticising of the female form. Popular culture at this time was surrounding women in sexualised areas of design, including clothing that contributed to the objectification of women's bodies (Arnold, 2001).

My recognition of the pivotal changes that transformed the associations of lace sparked my interest in ideas around the social construction of beauty and the sexualisation of women. I am intrigued by the contributing role that lace has played in eroticising the body when worn as a single layer, exposing the underlying skin. To understand clothing in the context of sexual desire, I choose literature that offers a broader theoretical look of dress (Wilson, 2010; Edwards, 2011) and the relationship it has with the body (Entwistle, 2000). I focus on theories that incorporate a psychoanalytical approach (Freud, 2000; Flugel, 2003) a feminist view (Wolf, 1991; De Beauvoir, 1997) and theories of fashion that reflect on the sexualised body (Arnold, 2001; Steele, 1996; Evans, 2009).

Since I had started to form my own ideas around lace it was important to apply suitable research methods to my practice-led study that allow for a parallel understanding and an empirical inquiry. The study follows the definition of practice-led research as set out by the Art and Humanities Research Council review: "Research in which the professional and/or creative practices of art, design or architecture play an instrumental part in an inquiry" (Rust, Mottram & Till, 2007: 11). This type of inquiry allows for the interconnection of my tacit knowledge as a practitioner with the formal and structured methods of academic research to assimilate and resolve the questions that have formed.

I have adopted Action Research as a method to challenge my thought processes and implement change within my practice. I use the theories of Donald Schön and *The Reflective Practitioner* (1991) to support my action research method. This method offers me a permeable boundary between academic researcher and creative practitioner through a process of practice-led research. Schön states that through this process the participant "reflects on the phenomena before him, and on prior understandings which have been implicit in his behaviour" (Schön 1991: 68). Our knowing is said by Schön to be in our actions. This method permits my tacit

knowledge as a practitioner to play an integral part in forming the inquiry. I introduce new self-reflective methods including theoretical research, reflective journals and mind maps, accompanied by familiar practices of sampling, sketchbooks and the process of making to create a study that is challenging and also comprehensive.

In order to gain a full understanding of the study I needed to get up close to artists and designers who engage with lace. This is achieved through a case study structure centring on the practice of others and by making direct contact with artists. Through interviews, exhibitions and literature reviews I gained a new awareness of their thoughts, practices and how others perceived them. In his analysis of case studies as a research method, Robert Yin clearly states that this method has a distinct advantage when a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary event in which the investigator has little or no control (Yin, 2009: 13). It allows the researcher to carry out an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context especially when it is hard to define the boundaries (Yin, 2009: 18). Case studies can allow for a rigorous approach to the study, if the procedures of research are systematic and the findings and conclusions unbiased (Yin, 2009: 14). Methods were adopted that corresponded with a rigorous approach through the gathering of multiple sources of evidence to create a process of triangulation and a convergence of evidence that included case study interviews and focus groups.

I have chosen the following five artists as case studies: Danica Maier (fine art), Catherine Bertola (fine art), Shane Waltner (craft), Cecilia Heffer (textile design) and Elaine Bell (fashion design). Each has worked with lace or with metaphors of lace to convey themes in their work. Case study research opened the opportunity for my practice to also be included in this process, providing through my own application an understanding and questioning that contribute further to the research.

Through the research of artists and the reading of literature questions arose that questioned why lace, a fabric that began to make an appearance on clothing in the fifteenth century (Earnshaw, 1985; Kraatz, 1989; Browne, 2004), was now being used as a resource to express contemporary ideas.

I began by looking at artists using themes of lace and became interested in the practitioners that had taken a less decorative and structural approach, but instead used the associations of lace to express a socio-political view. I was drawn to a number of artists that conveyed powerful meanings and had confronting and overriding themes in their artworks. These included Doris Salcedo who uses lace

fabric cast in concrete and encased in furniture to express displacement and loss. Ann Wilson who takes the process of construction and deconstruction of lace structures to simulate networks while making reference to gender, death and sexuality. South African artist Walter Oltmann who uses wire and lace making techniques to create art pieces that challenge our understanding of HIV and Aids. Miranda Whall whose drawings of intricate lace like patterns, depict explicit images of herself and her quest for fertility alongside everyday objects (*Lace Drawings*, 2002–2004). Each artist had borrowed and exploited at some point a variety of themes, symbols, associations and constructions of lace while expressing a varied and diverse area of subjects.

My own response to lace metaphors in the context of art practice was established in the Nottingham Trent University (NTU) lace archive. This resource offered an introduction to historical lace and a complete immersion in an unfamiliar area of textiles. Although the aim was not set out to contribute to the historical or technical literature on lace, it was important for me to have an appreciation and understanding of lace in a historical and educational context and to recognise how the archive had been used as a resource in the School of Art and Design.

Nottingham Trent University Lace Archive

Nottingham School of Art & Design, established in 1843, provided the region with skilled workers, designers and managers to contribute to the lace industry. The archive was formed through bequests to the former School by the Nottingham Lace federation and local lace manufacturers who were connected to the school as governors. The archive was used as a resource from the opening of the school to inspire and educate potential designers offering a rich and diverse accumulation of artefacts that would encourage creativity and sustain the industry with new work and design that kept pace with the changing fashions. It was often in the interest of manufacturers to play an active role in the Schools of Art and Design with many of them producing prize-winning designs that would be bought by various textile industries (MacDonald, 2004: 135).

The collection contains a variety of artefacts donated over the period from 1880s to 1940s that are associated with the manufacture of lace. The archive holds approximately 75,000 items; these include single lace pieces in manufacturers' sample books, photographic and design portfolios, hand-made lace dating back to the 1600s and a comprehensive book collection comprising historical and educational literature. The archive now also includes aspects of social history relating

to the day-to-day working of the lace mills including wage books, photographs and salesman's logs books. These artefacts were donated when the mills ceased trading in the decline of the lace industry. The majority of donations have been made from the late nineteenth century up until the mid twentieth century with a substantial donation from the Nottingham Fashion and Textile museum in 2010.

The archive was rehoused in 2009 in a purpose built room and was officially opened in February 2010 as a resource for students. A new steering group has been formed to support the collection, featuring a range of key academic experts as well as leading figures in lace and museology from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and The Bowes Museum in County Durham. The collection is actively used as a resource for students and staff across the whole of the school and currently has three PhD studentships based within it.

Other archives and museums also contribute to my understanding of lace and play a role in gaining a broader and more knowledgeable grasp on the breadth of lace applications and techniques. These include:

Morton, Young and Borland (lace manufacturers), Ayrshire, Scotland

A visit to MYB at the beginning of the study gave me an insight and understanding of machine lace production. The techniques of manufacturing within the company have changed very little since the company was founded in 1900. Nottingham lace looms are still used by the manufacturer to produce primarily net curtains. MYB have also been working with the design company Timorous Beasties to produce a contemporary range of net curtains, TB have also helped and guided MYB in the production of their own range of wallpaper, *Paper Lace* (2008).

Nottingham City Museums Fashion and Textile Collection, Nottingham, England

Although the museum no longer exists I was able to visit the storage facility that houses the collection. The collection contains a large amount of ladies' gloves made from netting, crochet and lace. I was interested in the simplicity of the gloves. I was particularly interested in the gloves that showed signs of soiling, disrepair or attempts at darning. The gloves were recorded through photographs.

Dents (glove museum), Warminster, England

Glove manufacturers Dents were established in 1777 and are still producing fine leather gloves today. I was interested in the ornate and heavily embroidered Gauntlet gloves and lace gloves held in the collection. The personal tour was recorded for

reference and photographs were taken of gloves that I found had particular interest for me.

The Fashion Museum, Bath, England

The museum houses a collection of gloves belonging to the Worshipful Company of Glovers of London. The collection includes items dating back to the seventeenth century. I was interested in the heavily ornate and intricately stitched pieces that often included embroidered lace edges. Images of these gloves were used as resource material for the concepts that were becoming important to my developing practice.

The Outcomes of the Research

This research has culminated in a body of artwork that demonstrates the integration of reflective practice and academic research and, in turn, contributes to my field of practice. The study also provides a conceptual framework that is important and relevant to artists, museums and curators; it provides them with a comprehensive study that places lace as a significant and instrumental precipitator in visual art culture. Current literature tends only to address lace in a historical or technical context, whereas this inquiry contributes to the limited literature available by investigating the metaphorical value of lace and the noteworthy presence it has in contemporary creative practice.

This thesis establishes a philosophical approach to lace in the context of clothing and fashion. The study reflects on the pivotal development of lace in the middle of the twentieth century from a fabric that represented wealth, status and craftsmanship to a fabric charged with erotic tension. The implications of this duality are vital in establishing the current use of lace in visual art culture. Lace offers themes of heritage and craftsmanship and the prevalent issues of gender and sexuality that appear to be pervasive in contemporary society. Through direct contact with artist and designers and the involvement of my own art practice I establish a new understanding and insight into the influence of lace in current art and design practice. This contribution substantiates the value and relevance of lace to convey contemporary visual concepts.

The thesis is laid out to reflect the path of research undertaken: Chapter one discusses the method of action research and the introduction of reflection in regard to my art practice. The theories of Donald Schön, explored in his book *The Reflective Practitioner* (1991), play a significant role in defining the chapter to encompass the

role of reflection in my work. My new way of working through methods associated with academic research are explored and exposed to clearly illustrate the pathway undertaken in the process of practice-led study.

Chapter two explores the use of lace in the context of contemporary art, design and fashion. Lace is presented within a philosophical framework where definitions of dress, adornment and the body are outlined and analysed to determine the significance and presence of lace on clothing since the mid-twentieth century and the strong connections it has today regarding sexuality and erotica.

Chapter three addresses the use of case studies as a method to highlight and analyse selected artists and designers who work with lace as both a fabric and a metaphor for issues and notions relating to a contemporary culture. The methods used within this framework are explained and presented to the reader through structured analytical processes that contribute to the outcomes of the study.

Skin and pattern as metaphors for identity and beauty are presented in chapter four, linking back to ideas conceived in chapter two around the body and sexuality. The chapter highlights how these themes have manifested themselves in my practice and consequently my artworks while drawing attention to artists that have also used themes of skin and pattern as a vehicle to express concepts in their work.

Skin is discussed as a metaphorical canvas used to explore a multiple associations that can be applied to art and design. Connections are then made to the application of pattern in the context of skin as both a permanent and movable fixture, reflecting on the implications and symbolic meanings imbued. Historical pattern is also discussed in the context of findings made in the NTU lace archive, making correlations with creative movements in art and design. These patterns are then explained in the context of the artworks produced as part of the research.

Stitch is discussed in chapter five, and relates to the significance of hand and machine embroidery as a gender-specific craft. The chapter reflects upon the re-appropriation of gender specific crafts to redefine stitch and the social construction of the feminine. The chapter introduces the process of stitching to my practice and the effect it has had on the construction of the artworks produced for a new body of work.

Chapter six introduces the artworks created for the final exhibition that is an outcome of this research. Material processes are analysed in relation to the final body of work and the relationship it has to the themes generated and concepts formed through the exploration of historical lace. Methods of action research are re-examined and examples shown in relation to the artworks, offering an insight into the creative

thought process developed as part of the inquiry. The chapter also exposes the reasoning and intention behind the display and execution of the exhibition *Lacuna* (2012).

This thesis does not attempt to contribute to the current historical or technical literature on lace. Instead it presents an inquiry that investigates how lace is being used to transmit themes and metaphors in contemporary art practice. It contributes an insight into the integration of theoretical literature, academic research methods and art practice.

Chapter One: Action Research Applied to Art Practice

Introduction

The complex process of creativity is notoriously difficult to articulate and complicated to explain. From childhood I have felt comfortable translating thoughts and feelings through making; I find expressing through what I create an easier process than speaking or writing, I lose myself in materials and process. I feel surges of excitement when art works begin to evolve and develop. I think about ideas, shapes and forms constantly, I dream about my work as it is part of me and who I am.

Through this PhD study my art practice and process of concept development was introduced for the first time to academic research. Methods of reflection developed through an action research methodology were used to challenge my thought process and to bring about both an understanding of lace in the context of contemporary art practice and change in the creation and articulation of my own visual ideas.

This chapter investigates how I approached this practiced-led inquiry, defending the powerful interplay that research and art practice can have when successfully combined. It also discusses how and why this study was underpinned by an action research methodology. The chapter starts by historically contextualising practice-led research in art and design, beginning with the thoughts of Christopher Frayling and progressing to the definition as proposed by Carol Grey. It also attempts to lead the reader through the structure of research methods employed and explains how these were implemented to produce change and understanding within an art practice framework.

The theories of Donald Schön's *The Reflective Practitioner* (1991) play a significant role in defining the research and creating a structure for the inquiry. This chapter also attempts to unravel and address the way in which action research transformed and challenged my thought process leading to new ideas and ways of working that have become essential in my practice. An illustration is provided to map this change and clearly demonstrate the progression of actions that have shaped my creative response from a material-led to a concept-led creative process.

Practice-led Research: research through art and design

Practice-led doctoral degrees have struggled to be recognised and accredited as research. They encompass methods adapted from other research fields or apply unconventional methods to conceive theories through the process of creative

practice. The problem that appears to occur when regarding creative practice as research is where to place the knowledge. Christopher Frayling addresses this relationship in his seminal paper 'Research in Art and Design' (1993) where he distinguished three categories of research through the writing of Herbert Read and his model of education (Read, 1967) that reflected the types of research related to art practice:

- Research into art and design
- Research for art and design
- Research through art and design.

Frayling describes the first two, 'research into art and design' and 'research for art and design', as "straightforward", "identifiable" and "visible", each resembling Herbert Read's "teaching through art", they offer clarity on what is being achieved and communicated (Frayling, 1993: 5). When applying research through art and design it can be more difficult to define, however when this is applied to the process of practice-led doctoral study specialised research insights can be created. Bradley Hafeman and Daniel Mafe regarded it as a process that can be "truly emergent in its outcomes' and that it can become 'part of some other order of understanding'" (Haseman and Mafe, 2009: 220). The union of research through art practice offered me as an artist the potential for new insight and knowledge on my creative process through a self reflective process.

Carole Gray gave one of the first definitions of practiced-led research in 1996; her description determines it as having two aspects. Firstly, Gray identifies research that is conceived in practice, where questions, problems and challenges are identified and formed by the practitioner. The second research strategy is carried out through practice, "using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners" (Gray, 1996: 3). When looking at the definition as set by Gray and comparing it to my own practice-led research, it is clear that at the start of this project my practice was going to be challenged. I approached the research as an artist, not as a historian or technician in lace-making, I had no in-depth knowledge of lace and was working with a historical archive for the first time. I was subsequently confronted by a vast collection of artefacts connected to the long and interwoven journey that had led from hand production to mechanisation and mass production. There was a real potential to get lost in a mass of floral pattern and intricate structures without really understanding the meaning of lace fabric in a context that was poignant and connected to the use of lace metaphors in contemporary art. I aimed to discover why

other creative practitioners were using lace themes and through my own investigative process to establish my own understanding of lace.

At the start of my project, research methods were unfamiliar in the process of forming and articulating my ideas. I had always led through a craft process, creating pieces of work that had gentle underlying themes that did not represent my thoughts and ideas but carried my aesthetic intention and enjoyment of materials and making.

It was important for me to maintain my confidence through familiar ways of working, but with a focus on finding ways to introduce new methods that reflected on already embedded actions. Gray stresses the importance of using research methods familiar to the artist to achieve successful practice-led research (Gray, 1996). This combination of old and new methods in my practice afforded an opportunity to reflect, transform and instigate a new level of knowledge which was essential in allowing for change and understanding to happen.

Action Research as a method

I chose action research as a method because it channelled the knowledge I already had, introduced new methods appropriate to the practice of an artist and enabled reflection to instigate transformation. Donald Schön suggests that knowledge can be gained from the process of reflection and suggests that the reflective practitioner not only develops 'knowledge on reflection' but also already has knowledge in the actions she performs (Schön, 1991:49). Bob Dick, an advocate of this method in education, describes it as a group of research methodologies that follow action (or change) and research (or understanding) at the same time, and in most of its forms it is participative and qualitative (Dick, 1999).

The context in which action research was established as a method is attributed to Kirk Lewin (1952) working in the discipline of social psychology, then further developed by educational theorist Kolb (2003) and others. It is used by David Kolb as a model of learning to follow when implementing change and understanding. The cycle is often referred to as 'The Kolb Cycle', 'The Learning Cycle' or 'The Experiential Learning Cycle' (1994). The cycle can be described in four stages and follows a linear specific sequence:

- Concrete Experience (feeling)
- Reflective Observation (watching)
- Active Experimentation (doing)
- Abstract Conceptualisation (thinking)

Kolb proposed that each stage must be followed in a linear sequence for successful learning to take place; the cycle also suggests that to learn from an experience, reflection must take place (Kolb, 2003). However, when applying this to the practice of an artist, this linear model does not allow for any flexibility; it has a rigidity that does not complement the creative process which is often arbitrary and fluid. Bob Dick also questions the linear process and states that action and research need to take place in parallel through a “flexible spiral process” (Dick, 2002). This then allows for change and improvement through creativity whilst sequentially allowing for the development of understanding and knowledge through reflective practice.

Cal Swann qualifies the action research model as an appropriate method for the practice of design, especially “where the final outcome is undefined” (Swann, 2002: 58). Like Dick, he also suggests that it is important to have more than just a linear model and that the method has to allow for a “constant process of revisiting the problem, re-analysing and synthesizing revised solutions” enabling an “iterative” process (Swann 2002: 53). My inquiry required a method that enabled the flexibility of an outcome that was undefined and offered a return to initial ideas that had formed to challenge and synthesize my concept. This in turn would create a holistic approach that encompassed the whole study and mimicked the erratic thought pattern of an artist and also work in parallel to creative practice. Dick describes appropriate research as a process that “fits the situation and the goals you are pursuing” (Dick, 2002). It was important to incorporate my practice as part of the research to understand why and how themes of lace were being used and the implications this could have as a tool in my practice.

Action research also encompasses a varied and complex series of potential actions that allow for the inclusion and engagement of familiar creative activities. It permitted me to use several different research tools in parallel throughout the project, which included a research journal, document collection and analysis, structured and unstructured interviews and case studies. These research tools offered new directions and ways to work and conceive artworks, while strengthening my knowledge and understanding.

Action research offers a systematic way to reflect while participating in making or ‘action’. Instinctive practice is said by Dick (2002) to have the potential to increase conscious learning. This process was important in establishing how I implemented new strategies to evolve as an artist. Action research incorporates a familiar way of working generating a systematic enquiry that ultimately informed and improved my creative process and my subsequent artwork.

Learning through art and design is 'experiential'; we learn most effectively by active experience and reflection on that experience (Gray and Malins, 2004: 1). Experiential learning is an important way to develop and grow as an artist and 'action research' provided a method that reflected and complemented this process.

I turned to the writing of Donald Schön *The Reflective Practitioner* (1991) to understand the potential impact on creative practice through the implementation of action research. His approach recognises the importance of reflection from a wide range of applied fields including design. Schön states that systematic reflection is an effective way for practitioners to learn, take on the responsibility for change, as well as engage in research. Schön suggests that 'our knowledge is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing' so therefore our "knowing is in our action" (Schön, 1991: 49). The visceral and instinctive process of creating art is central to the way I communicate, however the actions are intuitive and difficult to describe. Schön defines these day-to-day skills and techniques as dependent on "tacit recognition, judgments, and skilful performances" (Schön, 1991: 50). These artistic judgments are part of the mental calculation of an artist, but my internalised process of tacit knowing had not been articulated or challenged in this way before.

As Schön explains, these actions happen spontaneously as part of the processes we already know, and automatically do without thought. Some things may have been consciously learnt at some point in our lives, but may not have been consciously remembered and appear as a reaction to certain problems or judgments. Schön describes these actions as "knowing-in-action". If we can recognise the tacit knowledge that we possess then we are capable of reflecting on the actions to improve our performance. The enhancement of knowledge is gained through a process of evaluation and reflection on 'action', but the process is not instantaneous and can take weeks and months and will vary according to the situation (Schön 1991: 62).

The recognition of tacit knowledge was introduced by Michael Polanyi, who stated that 'we know more than we can tell' (Polanyi, 1967: 4). He believed that we could bring together our conceptual and sensory information to make sense of a problem. He uses the example of a person's face and the ability we have to recognise it amongst thousands, yet we cannot usually tell how we recognise it (Polanyi, 1966: 4). This knowledge of understanding to distinguish shape, form, texture and colour suggests that we visually store and categorise information bringing it to the forefront when needed. Polanyi suggests that this is our 'functional structure' of tacit knowing

(Polyani, 1966:10). Action research combined actions that drew from my already present tacit understanding formed over years of being a creative practitioner and combined it with the knowledge gained through the process of academic study enabling change and understanding to happen in my art practice.

This approach integrated both practice and research to create a study that was inclusive of both old and new methods of working. It is suggested by Carol Gray (1996) that a pluralist approach which has multiple methods and techniques can be tailored to an individual project. The exposure to new stimuli, and the participation in new activities as both an artist and researcher, inspired me to embrace thoughts that instigated the questioning of my practice and the process of concept formation.

One of my main methods was mapping which became a key area of self-reflection and visualisation of internal thought processes and is illustrated in the chart 'My Learning Cycles' (Figure 2). This chart illustrates a clear progression of stages or cycles to show the gradual introduction of research through my emersion in the NTU lace archive. This introduction of new activities also played a part in establishing approaches that challenged and informed me as an artist, which in turn increased the capacity for 'reflection-in-action'.

Schön suggests that other activities taken along side practice that do not automatically fit into the context of practice can enhance the practitioner (Schön, 1991). He uses the term 'Frame Analysis' to describe these actions and define a set of potential methods to lead to an understanding that can bring about a deeper knowledge. Schön argues that in the life of any profession the 'framing of problems and roles' is needed to determine the kind of problems set in the context of practice. Previous 'tacit frames' found in their practice are questioned and consequently open up the need to 'reflect-in-action'. Schön takes examples of town planners debating housing issues or social workers dealing with social behaviour and architects problem solving design solutions in buildings, all creating frameworks in their particular field, through a process of 'frame analysis' (Schön 1991). The process to consciously reflect and apply a 'frame analysis' allows for the placement of practice in a broader context and which in turn achieves a deeper insight.

To understand the use of lace themes in contemporary art practice it was important to recognise the use, production and placement of lace fabric in a historical and contemporary context. This was achieved through research in the early part of my study and is represented in the 'primary cycle' of 'My Learning Cycles' (Figure 2). The 'primary cycle' reflects the processes taken to investigate lace fabric on more

than a purely aesthetic level and instead embraced both the historical journey and re-appropriation in the context of current creative practice. This process allowed for a deeper perception of lace and a foundation of informed knowledge that was used when reflecting on the development of creative and theoretical concepts.

New theoretical perspectives were achieved through the introduction of new methods of research that included literature reviews, conference papers and academic journals. This enabled the formation of new concepts and ideas that were explored in unison with my production of artworks. A significant change happened when I took part in a two-week residency in the Fine Art department at NTU. Summer Lodge¹ (Cycle B, Figure 2) took me from the confines of my own studio space that is not at the university to a shared space that surrounded me with thirty diverse artists. This time offered me the opportunity to think through making and totally immerse myself in my creative thoughts in a supportive environment and collective space. It also gave me the opportunity to engage in dialogue, reflect on my current research and explore the ideas that had been evolving as part of my lace inquiry.

Reflection is said by Schön to allow the practitioner to consider the phenomena and prior understandings that have been implicit in their behaviour (Schön, 1991: 68). Action research allowed for an approach to my question that was not just a historical or an observational record but a contextual and inclusive approach encompassing and informing my actions and reflecting on the actions of other artists that incorporated themes of lace in their work. This then enabled an understanding of the use and potential application of lace associations in my own practice, encouraging the development of new concepts that articulated my theories of lace.

¹ Summer Lodge is a yearly two-week residency held in the Fine Art studios at Nottingham Trent University. It brings together thirty artists to initiate 'new dialogues and critical exchange' through a period of sustained studio practice, it also includes a one-day conference (Maier, 2010).

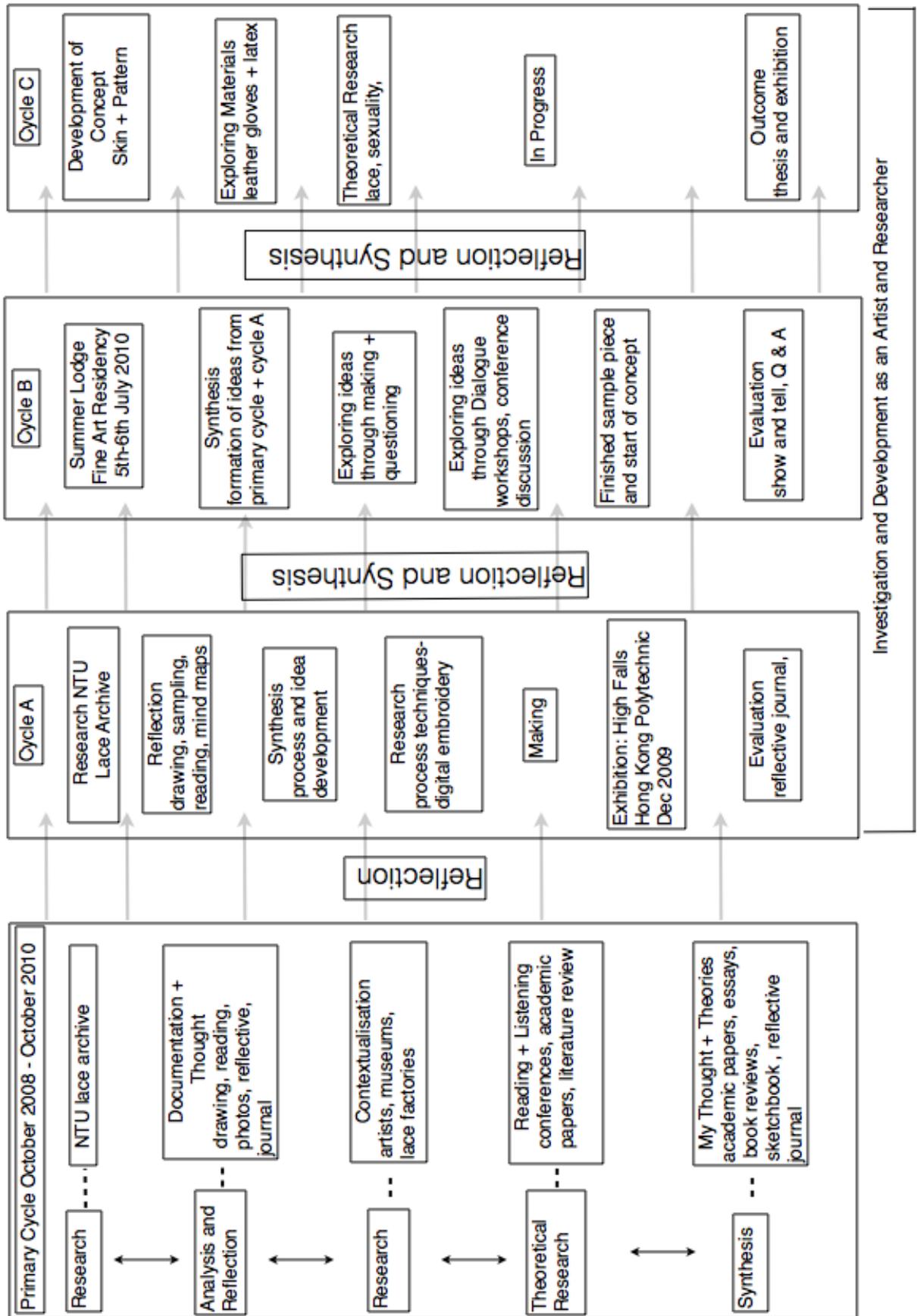


Figure 2: Joy Buttriss - *My Learning Cycles*, 2010.

The application of 'reflection' in the process of research

Activities took place that facilitated a metamorphosis within my practice, and which opened me to the potential for change and improvement. The bringing together of prior understanding, the NTU lace archive and theoretical study, challenged me in a cycle of learning that informed my practice in new ways.

The implementation of reflective practice was channelled through a variety of activities and conscious reflection became a new part of my process through the questioning of concepts and ideas. Sketchbooks and reflective journals were used to record thoughts and mind maps became a vital visual tool to question, analyse and solve problems. My reflective journals became a new vehicle to consider theoretical ideas that had been gained through my review of relevant literature. They provided a starting point for the formation of philosophical understanding that encompassed ideas around clothing, pattern and skin. They became a way to record and process ideas in the pursuit of the answers to the questions established through the inquiry.

Figure 3, Reflective Journal - October 2010, illustrates the ideas and theories I was starting to form, revealing the start of a review of literature that was relevant to my areas of interest. Although the pages are filled with abstract thoughts and references, distinct themes are starting to emerge that explore ideas around pattern, skin and beauty. As illustrated these were initially explored through the text of Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Joanne Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (1991) and Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion* (1993). Theoretical ideas became connected with my new process of concept development, instigating new ways of processing and linking thought and structure to produce new artworks.

A progression developed in my inquiry that mapped a broad spectrum of ideas around the gloved hand connecting the relationship of lace on skin and theoretical questions that encompass nudity and fetishism (Figure 4). In parallel, potential materials and processes were explored identifying with the act of making to express the exploration and development of themes (Figure 5). These thoughts were translated through my creative process to encompass and consider the potential symbolic meaning that can be generated through the application of decoration and embellishment on skin and were explored through vintage leather opera gloves on the finished artworks Glove 1–7 (Chapter Six: 125–131).

These maps became my way of clearing and sorting a thought pattern that was overloaded with text, images and ideas. Some ideas would be broken down

numerous times often drawn and torn from a roll of tracing paper and pinned to my board. This gave me the comfort of knowing things could be changed and revisited without it being a fixed process, maps were reworked and added to, the translucency of the tracing paper meant that the ideas could be overlaid forming a trajectory that was controllable and progressive.

An interactive dialogue was also created around my work through the inclusion of others; this took the form of 'show and listen' workshop sessions, supervisions and discussion with fellow colleagues. I started to voice my ideas out loud, opening a discursive relationship with observers and my audience. This introduced a vocal reaction to my work that challenged me while I was forming my concepts rather than once my work was finished and displayed as part of an exhibition.

This reflective process helped to align both developing theories and practice based exploration forming an interlocking relationship that was fed through each other to form strong ideas and concepts. The multiple tools of action research offered a diverse array of methods that helped inform and complement my internal thought pattern.

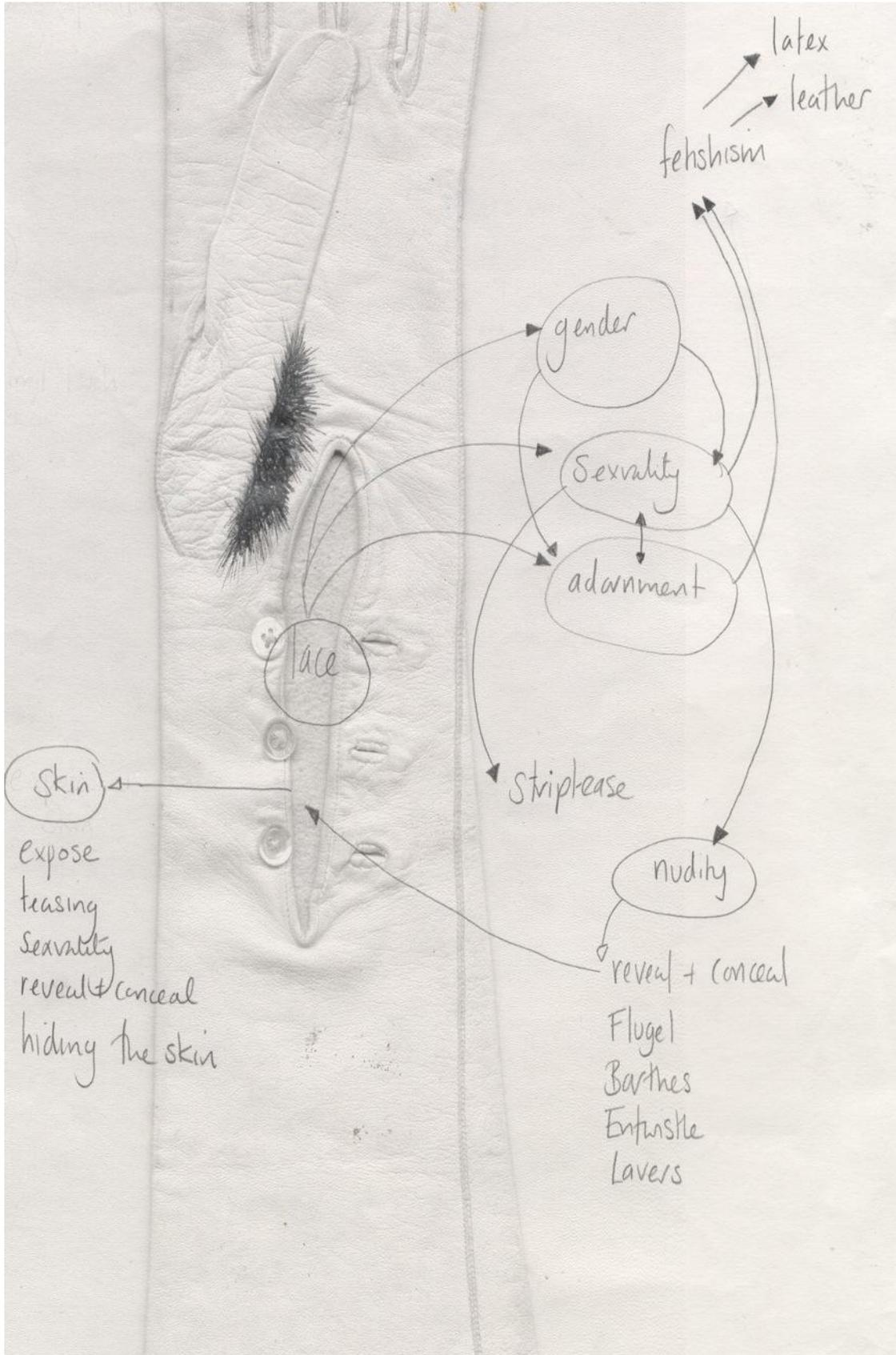


Figure 4: Joy Buttriss, *Reflective Journal*, January 2011.

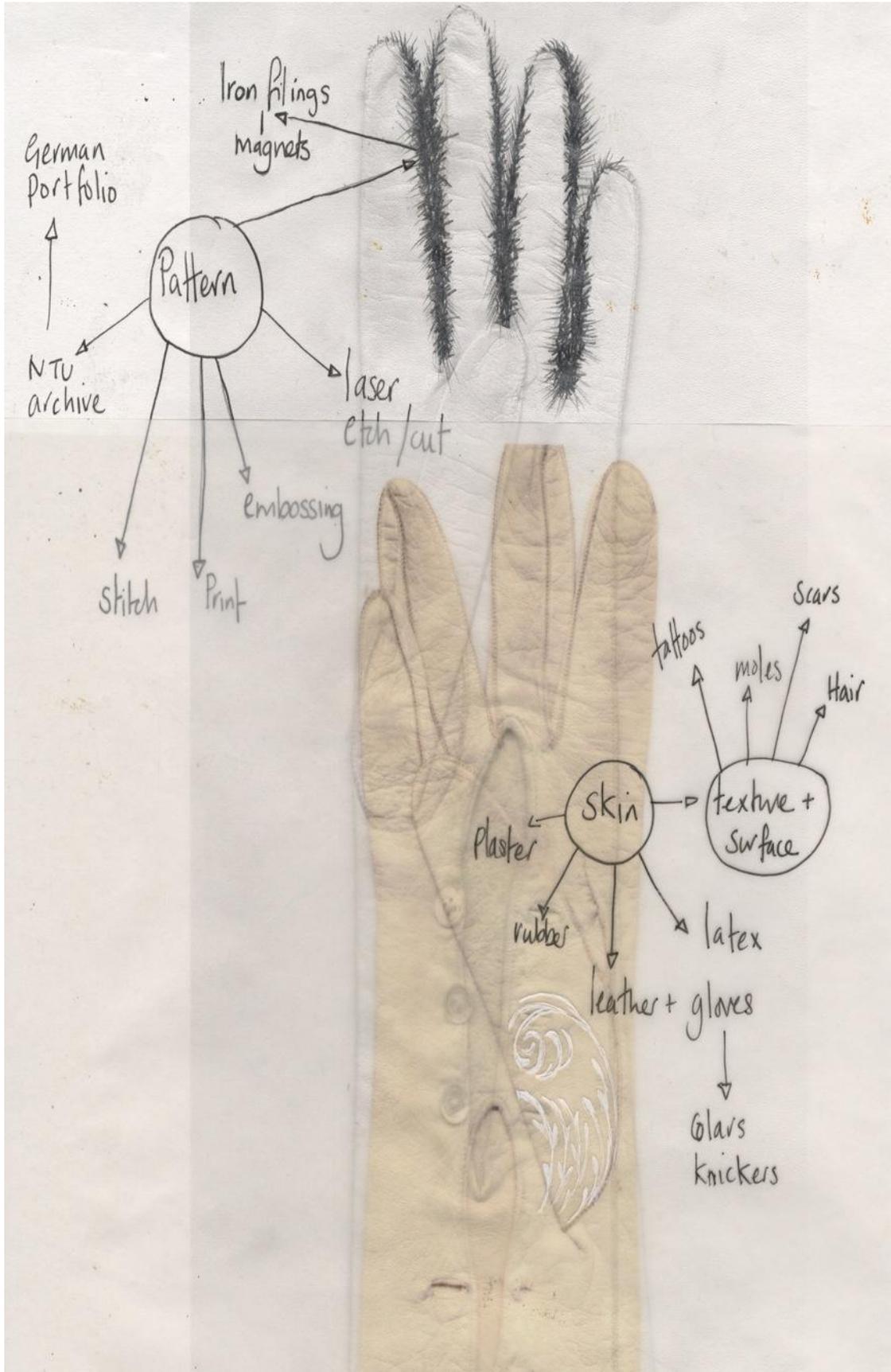


Figure 5: Joy Buttriss, *Reflective Journal*, January 2011

Conclusion

Action research has given my practice a method that has introduced reflection into my creative process. Connecting my already established tacit knowing with explicit knowledge gained through theoretical study and academic research methods formed a new process of concept development.

Vital research tools have been combined with my long established technique of working to create a new and challenging process that questions continuously my reasoning and actions. The use of reflective journals, mind maps and sketchbooks has provided a reflective visual journey and enabled me to form ideas. The academic process has required me to articulate my ideas verbally, opening them up to be challenged, confronted and introduced to alternative thoughts and ideas from my peers and colleagues. The inquiry and doctoral process have required me to place and substantiate my theories in the context of academic literature, enabling me to develop and progress as both a researcher and an artist.

These combined actions have questioned my way of working enabling change and encouraging a reassessment of process that has enriched my theoretical understanding as an artist. My initial intuitive process of creativity has been exposed and challenged through a constant revisiting of themes and ideas through a framework of reflective actions. My tacit knowledge of creative processes and materials has been complemented with an action research methodology to provide an effective way to enable new creative thought and develop my theoretical ideas that have formed through the study of lace.

The following chapter highlights the areas of historical research, theoretical discourse and contextual art practice that have been instrumental in forming the ideas and concepts to create new thought. Ideas around lace and the body are discussed, making links with the implications of lace to symbolically represent status, sexuality and erotica.

Chapter Two: Lace as a Metaphor

Introduction

The intention of this chapter is to contextualize lace within literature, art, design and fashion. Through this overview, an understanding of the metaphors of lace being used to articulate contemporary ideas is established. The chapter starts with a brief explanation of the existing literature on lace in the context of historical studies relating to technique, applications in clothing and its industrial development from handmade to machine-made lace. Past and current academic inquiries are also explored to gain a perspective on the widespread interest in lace fabric and the themes that have become associated with it.

This chapter also acknowledges significant international exhibitions that employ an interest in lace while recognising a selection of the individual artists involved. Once the historical and contemporary context is established, the text focuses on a selection of creative practitioners whose themes explore ideas around gender and sexuality. The use of lace is analysed by addressing the multifarious ideas and metaphorical associations of lace that are present in their work and by exposing the rich resource it offers to use as a platform or application in art practice.

The study is led towards an exploration of why lace is linked with such a diverse and contradictory pool of associations that started with its application in clothing and fashionable (as opposed to functional) attire. The chapter examines how this delicate and initially purely decorative fabric, often associated with femininity, has played an important role in the adornment of bodies to transmit signals of status, wealth, power and erotica. Religious rituals that mark significant occasions have also historically embraced the wearing of lace, such as the veils of the grieving widow and the virginal bride, the ceremonial robes of the priest and the christening gown of the infant. Lace in fashion is addressed from the sixteenth century to the present day with the main focus on the twentieth century, tracking the influences and development of the fashion industry to determine the look of women.

This chapter identifies ideas and themes that have evolved through the exploration of lace clothing and the material significance of lace to attract attention, to affect visibility and to signify power. Firstly, the material qualities of lace are discussed, identifying the unique construction of lace to capture the viewer in a 'hide and seek' interplay that both reveals and conceals the body and skin. Secondly, an investigation is made into the Western interpretation of adornment to display themes

of sexuality. This inquiry covers the intimate connection of pattern and skin as a trigger for the objectification of women, through the construction of a decorated body that simultaneously creates visibility. The text explores the idea of lace in a unique position on the body, resting between skin and clothing, covering and exposing the body at the same time to create a powerful reactive connection with the viewer. Thirdly, the chapter explores enticement through the materiality of lace establishing a link with cloth and fabric and fetishistic practices.

These three areas of 'reveal/conceal', 'adornment' and 'fetishism' are discussed to challenge the understanding of the significance of lace as a popular choice in female fashion. The chapter establishes the implicit assumptions associated with lace fabric that defend and illustrate its unique appeal.

Lace in Context

It is an important part of the study to understand lace in a historical context and to gain an overall knowledge of the literature connected to lace. A wide spectrum of material is readily available on the heritage of lace, but there are limited perspectives on the unique materiality and value of lace in our culture and the influence it has on contemporary art, fashion and design. Uniquely, therefore this section establishes the current international interest in lace as a starting point for exhibitions and awards illustrating the diversity of associated themes.

The historical literature focuses on systems that categorises and identifies types of handmade lace and machine made lace (Earnshaw, 1980; 1986; 1982; Shepherd, 2003; Reigate, 1986) or studies of the machine lace industry (Mason, 1994; Halls, 1973). Earnshaw has written the most comprehensive and some of the most authoritative books about antique lace, including *The Identification of Lace* (1980) which covers the identification of handmade and machine-made lace and which targets collectors and dealers who want exact identification. *Lace Machines & Machine Laces* (Earnshaw, 1986) offers a comprehensive and detailed account of all major lace-making machines, and *Lace in Fashion* (Earnshaw, 1985) covers the period from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, investigating the wearing of lace while taking into consideration the social, political and economic changes that affected it. Sheila Mason contributes to the history of Nottingham Lace in the East Midlands, covering the period 1760–1950 for the invention, production and trade of lace fabric, giving an account of the mechanisation and industrialisation in the region (Mason, 1994). There is also a large amount of literature that gives technical

information on the making of specific types of handmade (Cook, 1988; Wright, 1983) lace informing the reader on designs and applications.

Fashion literature (Earnshaw, 1985; Kraatz, 1989; Levey, 1983) records the historical and chronological order of techniques and applications in dress detailing styles and applications. Museums have produced literature highlighting significant collections (e.g., Browne, 2004; Hashagan and Levey, 2006), offering a visual record with brief historical accounts of the history of lace. Clare Browne (Browne, 2004) focuses on a 100 historical items from the lace collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, which houses one of the most comprehensive collections of lace in the UK. All these studies, apart from *Solstiss – the seduction of lace* (Kraatz, 2006) visually suggest a deeper understanding of the impact of lace as a tool of meaning, enticement and seduction; very little literature attempts to enter into or offer a debate on the use of lace as a means of communication or inspiration for artists and designers. In this context, the current study is ideally placed to contribute to the fields of fashion, textiles and art by offering an examination of this neglected history of lace.

Past academic PhD studies that incorporate lace include H. Williams (1981), H.J. Yallop (1987), E.C. Walsh (2009) and R.R.N. Brompton (2002). These completed studies reflect an interest in the historical significance of lace. However, a number of current studies appear to be more concerned with the potential to interpret lace in the context of the contemporary, through exhibition, design and art practice.

International exhibitions have interpreted lace in a new context, while still celebrating historical connections and manifestations of lace. Belgium, renowned for its handmade lace, hosted the first international event dedicated to contemporary lace-making in 1983 (Steyvoort, 2006). The International Lace Biennial – Queen Fabiola’s Grand Prix (1983–2006) continued for almost twenty five years and became indicators of the creative directions of lace, each year’s exhibition encompassed a theme with the final exhibition ‘Contemporary Art’ set to encourage and develop ‘Art Lace’ (Steyvoort, 2006). Belgium also hosted a major lace season in Bruges entitled *The Face of Lace* (2008), the four-month-long exhibition took over the city with interior and exterior installations and light displays, celebrating the importance of Bruges in the making of traditional lace². The exhibition was produced by the

² The exhibition also displayed contemporary interpretations influenced by technique and form and suggested by Sibylla Goegebuer in the catalogue introduction as “the modern method of working with lace” (Goegebuer, 2008: 7). *The Face of Lace* exhibited work that was being produced across Europe in art, design and fashion, by designers, artists and students,

curators and designers Hedwig Van Onna and Hanneke Kamphius who were also been responsible for *Ander Kant* ('*Other Lace*') exhibition (2006) held at Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam. *Ander Kant* encompassed the museum's extensive and significant collection of historical lace and the creation of new contemporary product design.

The interconnection of art and archives was echoed by the exhibition *Lace in Translation* (2009) at the Philadelphia Design Center based at the Philadelphia University, USA, and housing a collection of artefacts from the Quaker Lace Company based in the city³. Three artists were commissioned to create new work from investigative explorations in the archive. The chosen artists were Canadian sculptor Cal Lane (Figure 6), known for her large-scale welded metal objects that incorporate lace motifs and include discarded, found objects like cars, wheelbarrows and spades. Dutch product designer Professor Tord Boontje, Head of Design at the Royal College of Art, London, whose work is inspired by nature, is well known for his laser-cut metal *Garland Light* (2002) which sold at interior store Habitat. Also included in the exhibition was DEMAKERSVAN, a Dutch design team that produce lace-inspired chain linked fencing (2003 onwards) (Figure 7), originally using bobbin lace as inspiration to construct the fencing, replicating historical lace motifs that are transformed into metal open work fencing. *Lace in Translation* (2009) exhibited both the commissioned artworks and historical artefacts side by side.

The structural formation of lace and the opportunity to re-evaluate the configuration of lace to embrace new materials, scale and motifs relevant to our contemporary culture were explored in the *Love Lace International Lace Award* (2011) at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia, which set out with a criterion that wanted originality and creativity to be conveyed through materials and techniques. Earlier versions of the International Lace Award were held in 1997 and 2001 with designs invited on the theme of 'openwork fabric', till the award changed in 2011 to encompass 'openwork structures' which enabled submissions from a broader spectrum of media, including digital media. The museum received seven hundred

including an installation by Alphons Ter Avez, 'Catwalk' (2008) in the street using road marker paint as a lace carpet. Chris Kabel produced a lace map erected in the town as a way-finder for pedestrians.

³ The collection includes a large amount of machine-made lace samples and sketches from the head designer Fredrick Vessey (1862–1948) who originally came from Nottingham, England along with Nottingham lace machines and skilled lace weavers (Packer, 2010).

entries from thirty-three countries. One hundred and thirty-four artists were selected to produce work that was described by curator Lindie Ward as "an interactive and cross- disciplinary approach to the open work structure of lace" (Ward, 2011: 13) and which used conceptual interpretations of place. The diversity of approaches was extensive and materials used went beyond traditional representations of lace since the work was made with metal, wood, wire, hair, leather and precious metals as well as the traditional materials of cotton and silk.



Figure 6: Cal Lane, *Lace in Translation*, 2009, oil tank, New York.

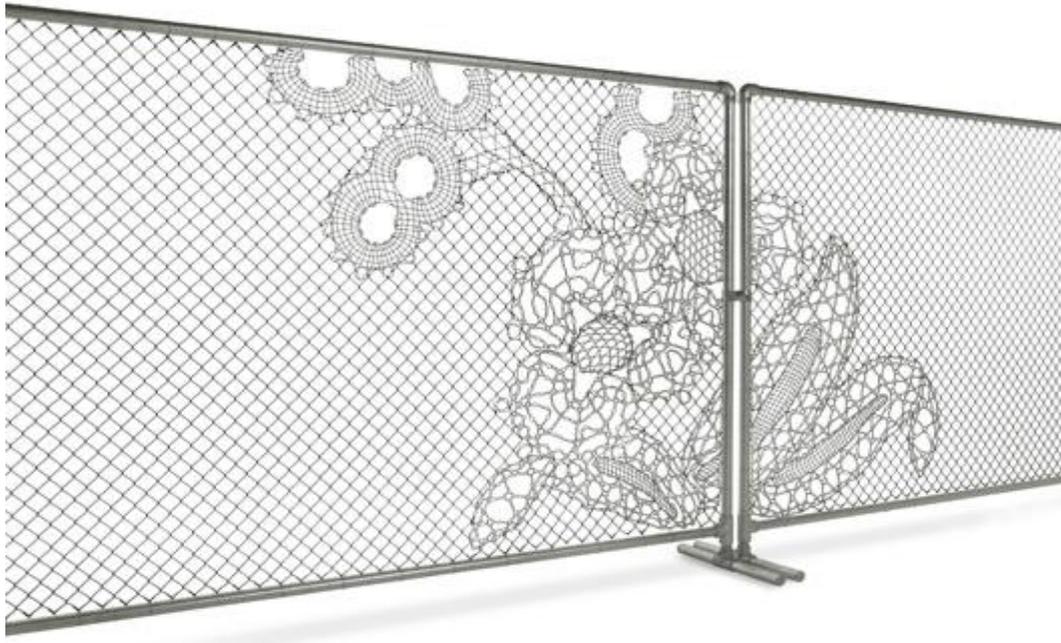


Figure 7: DEMAKERSVAN, *Lace Fence*, 2003, bobbin lace technique using galvanized steel wire.

American artist Helen Pynor knitted together single strands of human hair in the piece *Untitled (Uterus and Urinary)* (2011) (Figure 8) and created a ghost-like presence that represented a woman's internal reproductive organs, making reference to both life and death. Ann Mondro, overall winner of the International Lace award, created an intricately crocheted form using fine wire, which replicated a Henry Ford four-cylinder engine. Entitled *Detroit Shadow* (2011), the work was produced to represent a defunct motor industry and paid homage to the workers who built similar engines. The Love Lace exhibition reflects the diverse breadth of submissions that encompassed large-scale installations and intricate textiles and jewellery; most exhibits challenged the structural perceptions of lace.

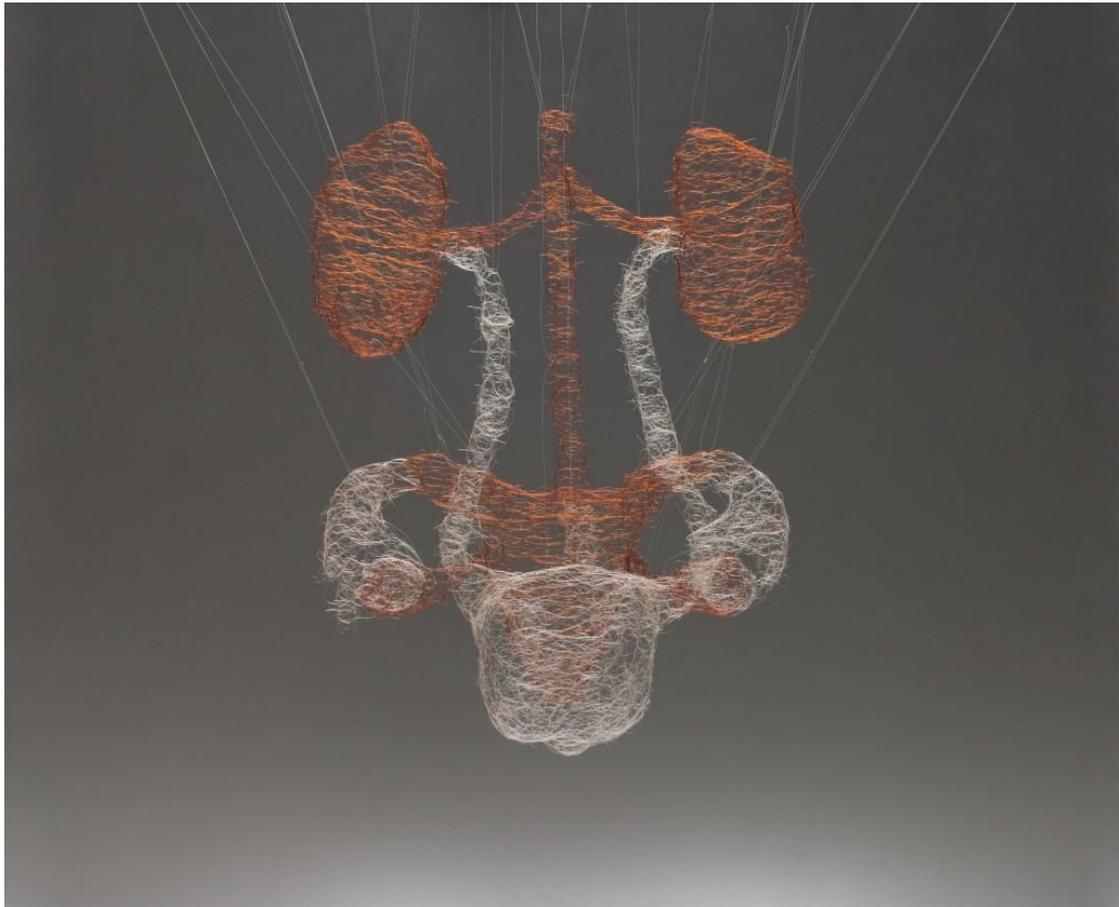


Figure 8: Helen Pynor, *Untitled*, 2011, knitted human hair, 29 x 36 x 20 cm.

Textile curator Lesley Miller, Professor of Textile Culture at University for the Creative Arts, Farnham, UK, has over the past twelve years presented the idea of textiles as a medium for art practice. Her latest exhibition, *Lost in Lace* (2011), at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery investigated the structure of lace in relation to space. It featured a large-scale work that consumed the surroundings to create environments of thread. The exhibition's aim was to introduce "radical new approaches" to lace and to "make you think about lace in a totally different way" (Crafts Council, 2011). Artists were commissioned to produce work that embraced ideas around the structure of lace and allowing it to inform their practice. Although the exhibition did not offer me the 'radical new approaches' I was expecting it encompassed many varied ideas on structure and form. The artworks that engaged me the most encompassed more than just structure and played with ideas around the metaphors and experience of lace. Chiharu Shiota filled a room with black threads caging five oversized white dresses, *After the Dream* (2012) exposes an unsettling side to lace with threads and networks that entrap and suffocate. Piper

Shepard produced a veiled lace archway in black lace that had been painstakingly cut by hand and copied the form of an intricate *point de gaze* lace found in the collection of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Both pieces had a presence that challenged and questioned structure while creating spaces that invited the viewer to interact and enter the artwork while relinquishing their expectation of lace.

Artists using metaphors of Lace

The varied connections with lace in contemporary art, design and fashion offered me as an artist a large resource to explore, but what excited me the most in my research was the associations of lace that embraced ideas around gender and sexuality and the darker side of lace. My focus then became artists and designers who are using lace to display a connection with socio-political themes around the feminine rather than the decorative structure of lace fabric. This section explores some of this work by contemporary artists who use lace to explore these themes.

Historically, the role of lace in art has often conveyed issues of gender and sexuality, perhaps starting with the contribution that artist Miriam Schapiro made in the 1970's in her display of 'femmagés' – collages and assemblages of women's' work. Her initial use of lace came as part of a feminist art program at the California Institute of the Arts in the early seventies that culminated in the creation of *Womanhouse* (1972). It consisted of a building in Los Angeles filled with objects and environments that indicated the phobias, dreams and fantasies of the women who made it (Seiberling, 1976: 62). Schapiro describes the process of creating *Womanhouse* as an act of "peeling off layers" and "connecting with part of her life she had ignored". Her use of lace fabric in her own artworks became a symbolic gesture, which she describes as "conveying layers" and "transparencies" (Schapiro, in: Seiberling, 1976: 63). This is achieved both physically and metaphorically with fabric often glued directly onto the artworks or as a stencil for paint. The collages are veiled with layers and textures that suggest a connection to the domestic setting and allude to entrapment and confinement. The structural qualities of lace offered Shapiro a platform that engaged with her inner feeling and thoughts, generating a slow unveiling of her own personal journey and a wider engagement with issues women face. Schapiro eloquently describes the powerful metaphorical value and use of lace to her as an artist:

for me it is a metaphor for space, history, ideology, politics. It conveys a lot of messages. It's strong, fragile, varied in pattern and form, structured, romantic,

functional. I think most women would like to be like lace (Schapiro, in: Seiberling, 1976: 63).

This quality of lace as a material for revelation was considered in the exhibition curated by the Museum of Art & Design (New York) entitled *Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting* (2007). The museum's curator, David McFadden, states that the aim was to "celebrate the unique intersection of intelligence, visual acuity, and skill that artists bring to the making of things of aesthetic value" (McFadden, 2007: 9). The exhibition attempted to challenge the complexity of structures inherent in the materials and process of making, while displaying a darker side that was thought provoking and unsettling.

Artist Ann Wilson, as part of this exhibition, engaged with the curatorial theme fully by challenging the viewer to think through her choice of materials and process of making, creating a visual assemblage that articulated an underlying foreboding. Her artworks often use intricate lines and threads consisting of lace, hair, pins and wire to explore networks and matrices through stitch, crochet, knot, net, animation, and sound. She describes her work on her website as evolving in a "conceptual space" where "ideas encounter the material processes of handwork and industry" (Wilson, 2011).

Wilson's drawings of threads suggest a connection between spaces of domestic culture and relationships, creating what she describes on her website as a balance between "sexuality and decorum" (Wilson, 2011). Wilson challenges us on many levels, taking familiar objects including domestic linen and applying home craft processes. In her artwork *Topologies* (2002) (Figure 9) vintage black lace is deconstructed and re-stitched to form assemblages that become marks and drawings on a long white tablecloth. Processes of scanning and digital reconstruction act as patterns which are used to reassemble the lace in stitch, creating an accumulation of intricate textural surfaces on the cloth. Implications of sexuality, death and gender are brought to the artworks through the use of black lace while simultaneously referencing other themes, which she describes as "relationships between systems of materiality (textile networks) and systems of immateriality (Internet and the web)" (Wilson, 2011). Stitch is used by Wilson to challenge the construction of the feminine through her selection of materials and connections with decorative craft processes. Her art piece *Feast* (2000) depicts the subtle brutality and challenging nature of Wilson's work with her use of stitch, described by Hattie Gordon as "stitches that clasp together wounded flesh" with rips, tears and holes that "honour imperfection" (Gordon, in: Koumis, 2001: 42). Detail is key to the success of

Wilson's work, drawing the viewer to take a closer look at the intricacies that incorporate familiar reference points that evoke a domestic setting but offering no comfort – only an unsettling disquiet.

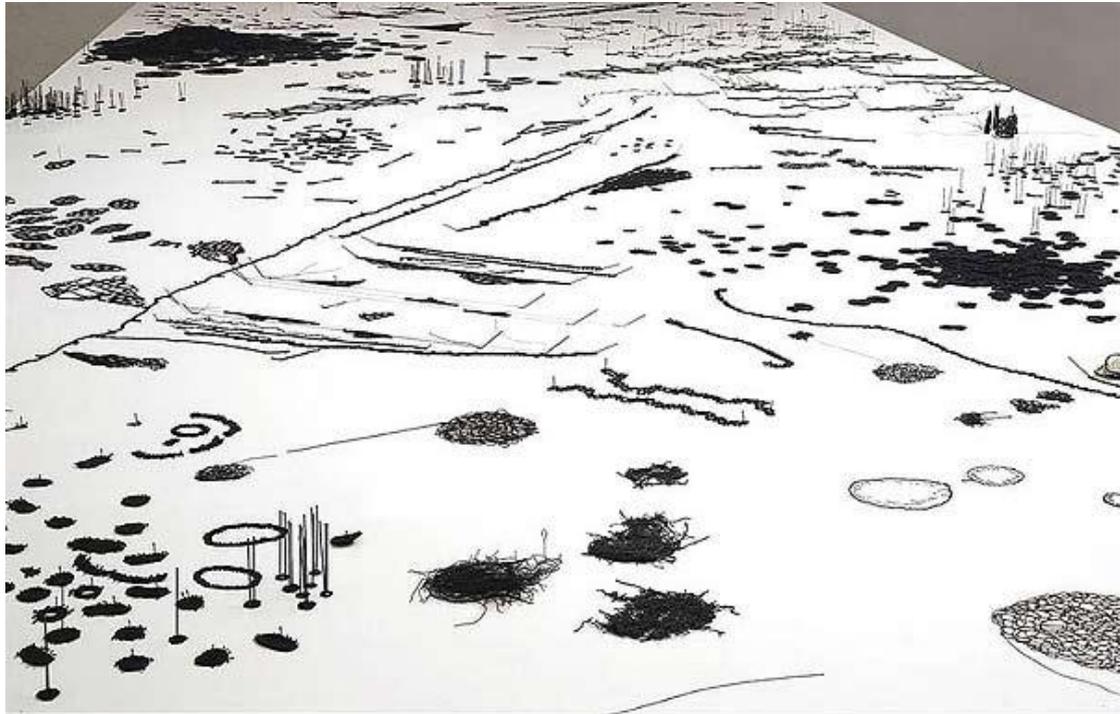


Figure 9: Ann Wilson, *Topologies*, 2002- ongoing, lace, thread, cloth, pins, painted wood support.

A provocative connection with wounded flesh is also a concern that runs through the work of UK based performance artist Kira O'Reilly, who confronts and challenges her audience with work that uses her body as the central theme. O'Reilly captures her spectators in a voyeuristic display, using her body as the site of infliction, and dealing with personal, social and sexual narratives. Her connection with lace engages with both its metaphorical and structural qualities and is delivered through a radical and subversive route. Her project *Marsyas: running out of skin* was funded by the Wellcome Trust *Sciart Award* (2003) and took place in the Department of Human Anatomy, University of Western Australia. O'Reilly worked alongside scientists to explore the cells of her body and processes of tissue culturing, engineering and microscopic imaging. Her project aimed to produce lacework patterns from the cell cultures of her own skin. O'Reilly describes the associations of lace as suggesting “the domestic, the intimate, the private, the personal, undergarments, the feminine, the excessive, precious and precarious” (O'Reilly, in: Hauser, 2008: 30–31). She invited women from the Western Australia Lace Guild to create lace structures that formed a lattice of cotton and Vicryl absorbable structures to seed with fibroblast,

pigskin cells and the cells of O'Reilly (Hauser, 2008). The study is still ongoing and aims to create 'in vitro skin lace'.

Lace associations have powerful connections with issues relating to gender, which were exploited by O'Reilly as part of *Unravelling the Manor House* (2010) (Figure 10) an exhibition of twelve artists who are "subverting the notion of craft" in response to Preston Manor in Brighton. O'Reilly's installation took place in the bathroom, and her imprints of lace pattern using her own blood on bathroom linen displayed an intimate representation of 'feminine staining'.



Figure 10: Kira O'Reilly, *Blood Lace*, 2002, blood and paper.

The intimate connection that lace has with the body through underwear allows it to express an intimate relationship that is often hidden. Like O'Reilly, Mirander Whall uses herself as the subject matter to deal with personal and undisclosed subjects. Her artworks *lace drawings* (2002–2004) (Figure 11) are intricately hand-drawn then rendered into linear digital illustrations that mimic lace motifs. So detailed are the images that she provides a magnifying glass to view the drawings and reveal the true configuration of the intimate images positioned within them. Objects that create our surrounding world are used and combined with intimate self-portraits that reveal her quest for fertility. Images of Whall are juxtaposed with images of birds, transport and farm machinery creating an unorthodox mix of femininity and nature to create work that engages the viewer to take a closer look.



Figure 11: Miranda Whall, *Lace Drawings*, 2002-2004.

In her essay *Contemporary textiles: the art Fabric* (2008), Janis Jefferies draws our attention to the connection that Whall has with lace. Whall observed her Great Aunt spending many hours making intricate lace items for the home but revealed little of herself in the process (Jefferies, 2008: 55). In contrast, the *Lace Drawings* offer an intimate exposure of Whall's private life and her quest for fertility, allowing all who view the work to be privy to her innermost thoughts and feelings.

The analogical value of lace to relates to both the structural qualities that reveal and conceal and to the metaphorical value that embraces a more intimate connection of womanhood, which allows for a retelling of gender-related experiences through a network of threads and patterns that can visually provoke and stimulate a reaction through an artwork. Whall exploits this relationship by engaging the viewer in a private and sensuous experience of lace through the subject, and through the scale of her drawings which need a magnifying glass. The relationship of subject, viewer and the viewed object becomes a more sensual and fuller experience, imbuing an understanding that is created through the size of the artwork.

Artist Chiharu Shiota (Figure 12) uses the disturbance of space, through the webbing of netted threads (often black) that intertwine to interfere with light and shadows to destabilise our view. A veil of threads interlace to envelop clothing, objects, people

and rooms disturbing our vision and unsettling our natural boundaries to create foreboding webs that suggest the balance between life and dream-like states. The viewer is drawn to peer more closely through a matrix of threads to the objects held within the net of holes. I am attracted to her use of white dresses that loom and are filled with an imagined body, which are then shrouded in dense black threads. Clothes are often incorporated into Shiota's artworks to make reference to a 'second skin'. She describes this as a bodily link to our first skin through the second skin of clothes. Pre-worn dresses are chosen deliberately to connect the artworks with the memories of the people who wore them (Shiota, 2011: 215). Her installations play on scale in an opposite manner to Whall; they are large and foreboding, dominating rooms and enveloping spaces with a paradoxical display of beauty and poetry, creating a strange visual balance. Her use of thread to create a lattice suggests a lace-like structure but does not resemble any formal pattern to suggest it is connected to lace.



Figure 12: Chiharu Shiota, *After the Dream*, 2012, dresses, paint, black wool, photo Sunhi Mang.

Walter Oltmann, however, uses the intricate and decorative process of lace-making to produce artworks that are thought-provoking through his craft-making techniques. His illustrative handmade lace in fine wire mesh depicts skeletal frames nestled in delicate patterns using his skills to challenge the audience through an uncomfortable subject matter. The imagery appears incongruous in the midst of the decorative netting that references the domestic while engaging with issues that are unsettling

and thought-provoking. *Mother and Child* (2007) (Figure 13) is a powerful and arresting piece that draws our attention to wider issues. The intricate and ornate quality of the lace is balanced with the fragility of the body and creates an x-ray-like quality of form, capturing the internal skeletal details. On closer inspection, the lace reveals a woman's skeletal frame with a nestling unborn foetus. The wire netting of the mother's skin becomes a permeable boundary, drawing our attention to the plight of many people in Oltmann's native South Africa through HIV and AIDS. The use of lace reflects the domestic, the decorative and the traditional home, juxtaposed with a reference to a cruel, uncertain and unforgiving disease, making the viewer engage with a wider political context.

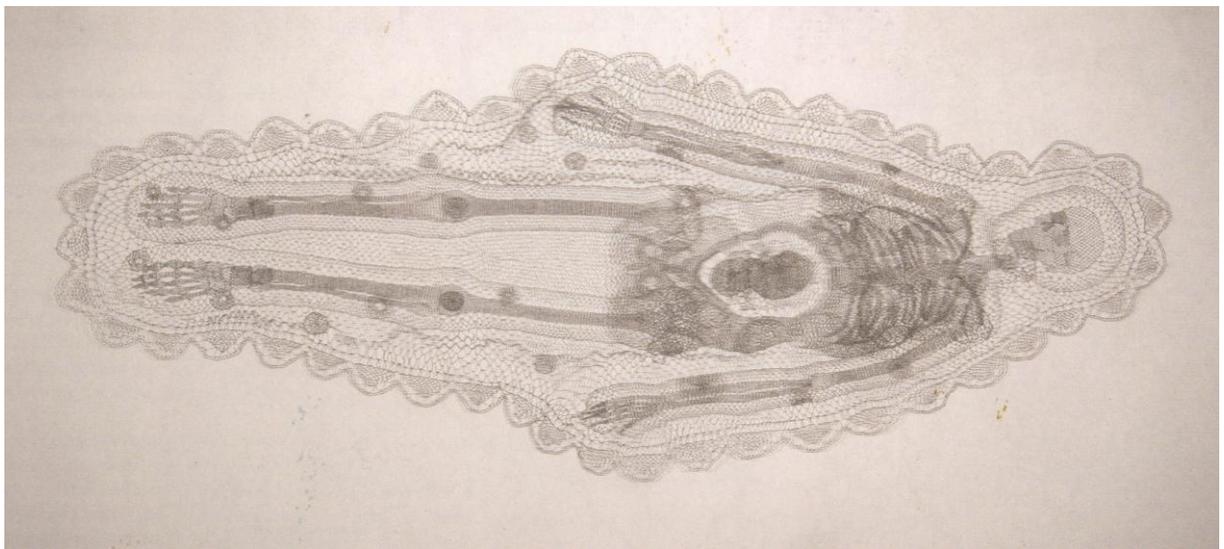


Figure 13: Walter Oltmann, *Mother and Child*, 2007, weaving, aluminium wire, 195 x 445 cm.



Figure 14: Doris Salcedo , B. 1958 *SIN TITULO*, 1992, wood, cement, iron, glass and lace, 97.2 x 116.8 x 66.4 cm.

Columbian artist Doris Salcedo also uses her artworks to express strong themes by transforming objects that should be comforting and familiar into objects of horror. Her sculptures are often a response to testimonials told by friends and relatives of victims killed during her lifetime. Her work evokes loss and displacement, exploring concepts of vanished human existence and the tragedy that caused it. Her combination of industrial and domestic materials produces gestures that are brutal and harsh, with a juxtaposition of traditional wooden furniture and delicate fabric. The encased objects relinquish their purpose and, in doing so, confront the viewer with both political and aesthetic contexts (*untitled* 1985–95) (Figure 14). Although the lace is saturated in industrial concrete, with only small parts visible, the fabric transmits associations that are powerful within the context of its placement. Lace offers an emotive connection that spans generations but still remains current and significant in the frame of reference within which it is used. Symbols of lace have become recognised in art as

a medium or theme that can be challenging and provocative combining the heritage of the past with contemporary ideas. Heritage became the starting point of my own investigations, with a historical look at the application of lace in clothing. My research references the history of lace from the sixteenth century through to current fashion trends of today with the main focus on the twentieth century, drawing attention to the social and cultural influences that have determined the look of women and cycles of fashion.

Fashion cycles

To understand lace in the context of our contemporary culture, I feel that it is important to look at the fashionable trends at the turn of the twentieth century and how these influenced the use and placement of lace. At this time, lace in women's clothing was lavish and extensive, and garments were embellished with hand-made lace to communicate status and wealth (Kraatz, 1989). As early as 1899, Thorstein Veblen distinguished what he called the "leisure class" who indicated an exemption from labour through their displays of extravagant clothing he observed that garments were quickly replaced with new trends creating a rapid turnover of styles and described with disdain what we now call a 'fashion cycle' (Veblen, 1994).

Veblen criticises the wasteful consumption afforded by this new-found spending power, which he particularly observed in clothing. He states,

Its futility presently becomes as odious as that of its predecessor; and the only remedy which the law of waste allows us is to seek relief in some new construction, equally futile and equally untenable. (Veblen, 1994: 109).

In 1904, George Simmel observed that fashion cycles were not only exclusive to clothing but could be applied to a number of areas including "art, conduct or opinion" (Simmel, in: Frisby & Featherstone, 2000: 204). The element of growth and accessibility of fashionable items to a larger group was said by Simmel to drive it to its doom, identifying that "fashion possesses the peculiar attraction of limitation" (Simmel, in: Frisby & Featherstone, 2000: 192). The time-consuming production of handmade lace was so costly that for centuries it created exclusivity and limitation that generated a desire to own it.

This cycle became counter-productive to the exclusivity of lace and followed what Simmel had already described as the "doom" of an item through accessibility, devaluing it and the desire to obtain it. Simmel recognised this pattern of behaviour as an adoption by the lower classes to impersonate the upper classes through

clothing, which was labelled later in the twentieth century as the “trickle-down theory” (Davis, 1992: 111).

The increasing abundance and visibility of lace on women’s dress was noticed by the church, and in moralising sermons elegant clothes were associated with “prodigality, lasciviousness, vanity, foolishness and memento mori” (Stone-Ferrier, in: Weiner & Schneider, 1989: 224). Morality through dress was associated with “modesty of deportment and avoidance of excessive finery” (Ribeiro, 2003: 127). The excessive nature of lace fabric used as trimming that was gathered and pleated to cover the garment was seen as frivolous, associating it with extravagance and immorality, but lace was not associated with eroticism in the eighteenth century (Kraatz, 1989: 82); it remained a decorative symbol of class.

The journey of lace from a status symbol to a garment associated with erotica happened in the nineteenth century. In the early part of the century, clothing continued to convey information about the wearer’s standing and character. Women spent large amounts of time to present themselves in an appropriate manner for their social group. Clothing reinforced stereotypes, dress was determined and restricted by age, class and social standing, and fashion was kept within these parameters, but society was going through dramatic changes with the onset of modernity.

Dress Reform was a movement influenced in the early part of the nineteenth century by simple dress and progressive views, often connected with feminism. The movement campaigned against the restrictive dress of women and was often associated with the rejection of the conventions and of Bourgeois lifestyles (Wilson, 2010). Dress reform movements were gaining strength, and were often associated with political campaigns of socialism and feminism, which were received with condemnation by general society (Entwistle, 2000: 109). The movement’s members elected to wear clothing that was more comfortable and rational and which did not adhere to fashions of the time. Women were encouraged to wear clothing that was simplified and could be worn for athletic activities.

The early twentieth century continued this period of development. These changes were also reflected in the accelerating rate of changes in fashion (Entwistle, 2000: 106). Undergarments were no exception; they went from a utilitarian garment in the nineteenth century to encompass the term ‘lingerie’ at the turn of the century. These garments became associated with privacy, intimacy and sexuality and were glamorous garments; Edwardian lingerie was thought daring by society, with most of

it constructed from delicate materials that were lavishly embroidered incorporating ribbon and lace (Wilson, 2010: 103).

Lace has remained constantly connected as a method of embellishment on underwear, developing an integral relationship with a garment strongly associated with the sexual and political emancipation of women and erotica. During the early part of the twentieth century, the movement for female equality grew. In their desire to be seen as equal to men, women began to try to move away from gender-specific attire. In the 1940s Simone de Beauvoir, addressed the role of the 'independent woman'; she established that in order to achieve the right of equality she must divide herself as 'object and prey', and present 'inert and passive qualities' in order to be judged solely by her appearance (de Beauvoir, 1997). The renouncing of her femininity she felt was to relinquish her humanity; she recoils at the suggestion made by men that to be judged as equal is to give up make-up and nail-polish when she felt that the "concept of femininity had already been formed by custom and fashion" (de Beauvoir, 1997: 692). The perception of femininity was gradually changing; women were fighting back at restrictions set upon them and this was being reflected in fashion and clothing.

Lace had seen a massive decline in production and consumption by the middle of the twentieth century when it was longer a fashionable 'must-have' fabric and little was seen on exterior clothing but its application on underwear remained a constant. A change in placement happened in the 1960s when lace fabric was being used as a single layer, exposing the skin and parts of the female form that would otherwise be veiled. This created an added erotic charge and reflected the increasing sexualisation of the female form and the visual exposure of the female body at this time.

This dramatic change in the appropriation of lace reflected the cultural and political influences of the time. The 1960s showed the desire by some women to adopt a fabric that reflected the changes that were happening in the Western world as women were achieving independence and sexual freedom. In 1961 the contraceptive pill was available to women in the UK, the British abortion act became law in 1967 and the censorship laws relaxed (Wolf, 1991: 134). Women gained a sexual freedom without shame or consequence and this was reflected in the clothing of the time; hemlines got shorter and the female form was exposed. The open-work structure of lace and crocheting offered the fashion market a fabric that conveyed a freedom, revealing skin and the contours of the body.

Lace was being adopted by the beautiful and famous. Actress Jane Birkin is pictured in 1967 in *Vanity Fair* with her husband at the time, composer Serge Gainsbourg (Figure 15). Birkin reveals and exposes her body in a crochet lace dress while gazing at her successful husband with his formal dinner suit that shows a hint of his extravagant lace cuffed shirt. Birkin was already successful in her own right at this time, but the caption reads that Gainsbourg is the “successful man” and Birkin is the “beautiful woman” attracted by his success (Robinson 2007). The image captures the contradictions of an era when women were achieving emancipation and success but men through economic power could still objectify and commodify them. The lace dress depicts both the liberation and the degradation of women at a time of cultural change. At the same time the question of gender identity was beginning to be challenged. The 1960’s also saw the start of the feminisation of men’s clothing, which is hinted at in Gainsbourg’s lace cuff, but this does not endure as a trend at this time. Ribeiro states that fashion transformations are especially present in a world that is changing and shifting politically and religiously (Ribeiro, 2003: 172). The 1960s reflected a time when women were becoming empowered and less restricted; there was positivity for the evolving opportunities that had been otherwise unavailable.



Figure 15: Jane Birkin and Serge Gainsbourg Paris 1969, *Vanity Fair*, November 2007.

By the 1970s university education was becoming more available, women were getting into positions of power in the workforce and had the desire and ability to get political about womanhood. However, this freedom coincided with a reduction in censorship in the media. Explicit images of women that had previously only appeared in adult magazines for men were being filtered into magazines targeted at women. This change in censorship introduced and exposed women to images that depicted 'bodies of perfection' (Wolf, 1991), setting an agenda that increased pressure and expectation on the role of women. Naomi Wolf draws our attention to the expectation of the 'ideal' female body

That gave a woman, for the first time in history, the graphic details of perfection against which to measure herself, and introduce a new female experience, the anxious and minute scrutiny of the body as intricately connected to female sexual pleasure (Wolf, 1991: 134)

A tension was created between the opportunities for women in education and the workplace and the expectation placed on them by a male agenda.

In this new, more inclusive society, a darker side was emerging that increased the objectification of the woman through a socially constructed female sexuality that was being formed by male-dominated media. Wolf (1991) describes this as "beauty pornography" which involved the idealistic construction of a sexual woman displaying positions of the body, titillating the fantasy of a male viewer and constructing an expectation for women to follow.

The influence of music and subcultures on the fashion world became apparent in the 1970s. The Punk Rock movement glorified S&M and a darker side to fashion; it celebrated skin piercing and ripped clothes that suggested sexual battle and violence, sex became more glamorous and threatening, touched by the fashion culture of the 1970s (Wolf, 1991; Arnold, 2001: 74). Mainstream magazines with brutal depictions of women became more commonplace; the blurring between the acceptable and the forbidden was challenged. Fashion at this time became more experimental, allowing women to form a variety of images. Buckley and Fawcett claimed that the 1970s allowed women to engage with a more complex range of identities than earlier in the decade (Buckley and Fawcett, 2002: 125).

By the 1980s high-class pornography, including *Playboy*, crossed over to mainstream culture, selling images to women that increased the variety of ideas about what female beauty was or should be. The pressure for women now was to live up to the over-sexualised images that were presented to them in magazines by

having the face and body that could achieve a climax of theatrical ecstasy as displayed. The pursuit of the 'body beautiful' became established at this time.

By the mid 1980s there was a significant shift in fashion to encompass designs that covered the whole body not revealing the any flesh and clothing it in tight fitted fabric, that revealed the bodies contour, but shielded the skin. A trend for women investing time in the gym or exercise to create the media defined perfect shape was commonplace, with women striving to reach a new perception of beauty that denoted a powerful frame (Arnold, 2001). An awareness and fear of the AIDS epidemic at this time could also be a reason for the way bodies were covered (Arnold, 2001; Buckley & Fawcett, 2002) as a symbolic barrier of protection. Rebecca Arnold argues that exercised bodies with tight-covering clothes acted as eroticised shields, revealing "a perfected exterior which acted as a fetish to ward off anxieties around death and disease" (Arnold, 2001: 76). Fabric's such as Spandex more commonly known as Lycra provided designers with a cloth in the 1980's that enabled the body to bend freely but also clothed it in a tight shiny layer that revealed the contours of the body.

Lace was being used in a small way on garments as trimming. Designer Laura Ashley demonstrated the trend for Victoriana and designed dresses that covered the body with long hemlines and high necks trimmed in lace. Lace was also present in the youth fashion and music culture that adopted a flamboyant, androgynous dress of the New Romantic movement through frilly shirts that referenced the romantic era. Women adopted a trend for 'Power Dressing'⁴ where the formal dress of men was mimicked and it became acceptable for women to wear trousers in the workplace and social settings. Smart skirt suits also had a strong presence at this time and changed office dress Arnold states that the skirt suit changed, becoming a statement of "feminine control and, significantly, sexuality" (Arnold, 2001: 105). This change was exemplified by the adoption of the strong padded shoulders of the traditional man's suit into women's wear.

By the end of the 1980s, fabric associated with the fetish culture was appearing in the media. The January edition of *Vogue* (1989) featured an article entitled *Skin on*

⁴ 'Power Dressing' is a term established at the end of the 1970's but more popular in the 1980's to describe a way of dressing that reflected a change in society. Fashion Designer Katharine Hamnett one of the most prominent names in fashion at the time produced a collection entitled 'Power Dressing' (1986). Arnold describes the collection as "heralding the fashion idea of the decade' that turned office dress into a 'statement of feminine control and, significantly, sexuality" (Arnold, 2001: 105).

Skin, presenting clothing in rubber and tight-fitted leather (Steele, 1996: 143). This article reflected the acceptance of the fetish subculture to the mainstream.

The idea of femininity also changed in the 1990s as women became self-reflective. Conveying and revealing the female experience became a central concern for women artists. An example of this was Tracey Emin, who often included herself as subject, creating artworks that convey personal thoughts and desires. This transparency was also reflected in clothes on the catwalk, where bodies were being revealed as “emblems of femininity” which, Arnold suggests, engaged the onlooker to believe they knew more than they did about the person wearing the clothes (Arnold, 1999: 71). The fashion to expose and reveal the body has remained a constant in trends in clothing; woman as sexual objects created through dress now dominates Western culture.

Timothy Edwards states that young women appear to actively promote an increasing “pornographication” of fashion, in a display of self-expression or sexual gratification. However the ‘trappings’ of such an action to expose the body in such an open expression is ‘for the most part not of the women’s making’ but defined by men (Gammon and Makinen (1994) in: Edwards, 2011: 84). The West’s obsession with the new, i.e., consumerism, is determining our identities and clothing trends have become intertwined and blurred. The sexualisation of the female form is still prevalent in our Western Culture. Lorraine Gammon and Merja Makinen say that fashion appears to be fetishistic and fixated on certain parts of the female body (Gammon and Makinen, in: Edwards, 2011). Lace fabric has an important role in this process. It aids the designer in creating clothes that evoke a historical heritage of status and workmanship but also allows the exposure of the body reinforcing the constructed sexualisation of the female body that appears to appeal to both genders.

Alexander McQueen's first fashion collection (*Highland Rape*, 1995) used lace to express raw and sexual themes. Semi-clothed women appeared on the catwalk, dazed and confused in torn and damaged clothing, incorporating distressed lace that suggested struggle and disruption. McQueen exploits all the connotations of historical lace, but captures the attention of his audience through contemporary themes of sexuality. His muse and patron, Isabella Blow, commented on his practice of taking the old and making it new, which Caroline Evans (2009) describes as “historical collage”. Blow describes McQueen’s process as sabotaging ideas from the past then making them thoroughly new in the context of today. His fabric techniques she describes as “abuse”, through a process that explores “all the erogenous zones on the body” (Blow, in: Evans, 2009: 142). The recurring presence of lace in

McQueen's collections suggests that lace allows for this exploration, balancing the expectation of craftsmanship and tradition in Haute Couture with a contemporary eroticisation of the female form.

Fred Davis states that clothing and fashion are synonymous with sexual availability and erotic taste (Davis, 1992: 81). Sex appeal plays a significant part in the allure of fashionable dress. Lace has the ability to cross the boundaries of social identity. It encompasses modesty and eroticism or the tension and dialogue between the two. Many designers have used and reused the associations of lace with craftsmanship, erotica and structure often combining multiple references and resonance for full impact and maximum visibility.

Lace: reveal and conceal

This section investigates power, but not through wealth and status. Instead, it deals with ideas behind the evolution of lace clothing to create a metaphor for female sexuality. The text establishes the powerful interplay of skin and pattern to engage the viewer in a 'reveal and conceal' relationship that entices us to observe and feel part of an intimate act of undressing. It creates a visual dialogue that can attract attention to confront the viewer with a potentially eroticised encounter, the sort of "visual impression" that Sigmund Freud suggested is the most frequent pathway for "libidinal excitation" (Freud, in: Strachey, 2000: 22).

Lace fabric can reveal small areas of the body through a web of threads that would otherwise be masked and hidden. This creates an intrigue and anticipation that carries a sexual charge associated with arousal. Freud refers to concealment as stimulating a sexual curiosity that entices the imagination (Freud, in: Strachey, 2000). The gaze becomes drawn to the revealed skin, enticing the onlooker with forbidden thoughts of touch and the revealing of the whole form.

Laura Marks describes this sensuous notion as *haptic visuality*, explaining it as "seeing the world as though you were touching it" (Marks, 2002: 2). The sensuality of experience is captured through sight, but is related to touch, bringing the viewer in close to the object, dissolving the boundaries created by distance. Her definition describes this experience as using "the eye like an organ of touch" (Marks, 2002: 2). However, the experience is not complete without the optical to set in context of the area it sits, allowing distinguished forms and borders between the subject and object. The complete experience is attained through a combined vision of haptic and optical sensory information in a "dialectical movement from far to near, from solely optical to multisensory" (Marks, 2002: 3). Marks describes the relationship of erotica and haptic

visuality as the point the viewer relinquishing his or her mastery, through the “respect for the otherness, and concomitant loss of self in the presence of the other” (Marks, 2002: 20). Lace also offers this duality of existence where both the viewer and viewed are compliant in the act to eroticise the body if they so choose.

Lace fabric tempts the viewer to imagine the naked body through the open work structure that reveals the skin but not the full body, mimicking the act of striptease. Roland Barthes states that the performance of striptease engages the viewer in a journey that starts with the presentation of the outer garments that are chosen to seduce and titillate, creating a spectacle that is about the stimulation of the anticipation of undressing, not the nakedness beneath (Barthes, 1973: 84). As Entwistle suggests, the process of the striptease depends on the mystery of clothes and the imagination of the viewer, and once the body is revealed, this negates the desire (Entwistle, 2000: 181). Clothes as props then have the power to entice, and create what Barthes calls a ‘delicious terror’ (Barthes, 1973), demonstrating a position of control by the stripper through a sexual enticement of the viewer.

Control through sexual means is argued by Michel Foucault to reflect the transfer point of power between men and women and that it has considerable “instrumentality” in a relationship (Foucault, 1978: 103). Although there is no intimate relationship in the performance of the act of striptease, its power is evident. The power is not in the definitive revealing of the naked body, but the controlled slow undressing determined by the woman. Lace fabric offers the potential to be used in a powerful way that is provocative and inviting, masking the body in an open work pattern that reveals and conceals at the same time creating an intimate display of sexuality and the building of a powerful relationship with the viewer. This position is sometimes depicted as glamorous and intriguing, but Arnold suggests that the glamorisation of women in this context is contradictory, and that women are condemned for using clothing as a seductive weapon (Arnold, 1999: 500). This attitude suggests that the sexual role of woman is to be the object, and perform in the boundaries of a restricted space for the pleasure of men, negating the capacity for women to engage in a powerful position in other situations.

The striptease is an extreme use of clothing to seduce and entice but it illustrates the intense relationship that adornment can have in creating a power relationship. Lace underwear also sits in this powerful position as the penultimate barrier between the viewer and the nakedness of the body. Valerie Steele (1996) calls this the “intermediate position” that creates an erotic charge, adding to the interplay of the ‘reveal and conceal’, acting as an anticipatory site to entice but not necessarily

oblige. Joanne Entwistle also states that the power of clothing can add sexual meaning and seduction to the body. Dress and adornment play an important part in the communication of sexuality and desire, in which “individuals can deploy dress strategically for sexual ends” (Entwistle, 2000: 207). Lace is perceived as a fabric that adds to the enticement of the performance, engaging as part of the enactment of striptease and also as the fabric often associated with underwear. The familiar presence of lace suggests an unspoken code associated with skin and the body.

Lace: adornment

This section develops the concept of ‘reveal and conceal’ into a discussion of the use of adornment to indicate sexuality and desire, and the role of lace to embellish the naked body. Arnold argues that the body has “become meaningless without the play of signifiers provided by clothes” (Arnold, 1999: 490). Entwistle and Wilson argue that we cannot omit the idea of the body without clothes when clothing in our Western social culture has constraints of acceptability; it is not legally or culturally acceptable to walk around naked except in designated areas (e.g. nudist beaches). The conventions of clothing transform the body to make it recognisable in a social context. The body is made ‘decent’, appropriate and acceptable, and clothing adds a whole array of meaning that would otherwise not be there (Entwistle and Wilson, 2001: 33). These constraints in our society determine that our naked bodies by law can only be acknowledged as dressed bodies, which in turn has a significant influence on the way we dress and present ourselves.

The naked body is referred to historically in art, religion and literature in association with innocence and purity. The symbolic negativity of dress is conveyed in Christianity with the fall of man by the clothing of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Hollander suggests that the Christian virtue of human nakedness is strengthened by the personal delight in it and that nakedness has its own fierce effect on desires, but the thought of clothing with nakedness underneath is even more potent (Hollander 1993). This then suggests that the interface between the body and dress causes a reaction that is powerful and enticing but also part of our cultural acceptability.

Over the past 500 years, women have been uncovering their bodies at the rate of twelve inches a century, including their upper arms, their shoulders, backs and legs (Harvey, 2008: 30), which has obliged women to choose how much of their body they want to show while still clothed. To understand the motives behind wearing different kinds of clothing, J.C. Flugel determined that “we need to be constantly on the lookout for changes in manifestations of these two fundamental conflicting

tendencies, the one proudly to exhibit the body, the other modestly to hide it” (Flugel, 1928, in: Carter, 2003:102). Yves Saint Laurent (Figure 16) also caused a sensation in 1970 when he designed a dress that incorporated an audacious scooping of the back that he covered in black Chantilly lace which diffused the skin in pattern.



Figure 16: Yves Saint Laurent, 1970, short cocktail dress in black crepe and black machine Chantilly.

The qualities of lace as a purely ornamental fabric cover the wearer with decorative patterns that can represent heritage and wealth but which can also add sexual tension and erotic significance, engaging the viewer to judge and connect with the person wearing lace. The addition of adornment in the form of cloth, jewellery or tattoos on the body can therefore potentially create a powerful interplay both for the person wearing the adornment and for the people that are viewing it.

Simmel argues that the motives behind the exercise of adornment are, an interwoven relationship between the external and internal self, communicating an egotistical side that involves others for it to be successful. The two opposite directions are mutually dependent, creating an arena whereby the person is, as Simmel puts it, “being-for-himself and being-for-the-other” to create a successful conclusion (Simmel, in: Frisby

and Featherstone, 2000: 207). The provocative nature of lace on the body can create a sense of power and visibility that can enhance and strengthen the personal wellbeing of the adorned woman through the attraction of others.

This individual display can be interpreted in a variety of ways, with both positive and negative consequences, each with the ability to induce a reaction that would otherwise not be there. As an element of adornment, lace inhabits a very personal and, it could be argued, unique position on the body. Although it is not fixed on the skin like a tattoo, the patterns and motifs intimately move with the skin, decorating, embellishing and drawing attention to areas of the body that are usually undisclosed.

Simmel suggests in his essay on adornment (Simmel in: Frisby and Featherstone, 2000: 208) that everything that adorns the body can be ordered along a scale in closeness to the physical body, the closest adornment being the tattoo. Opposite to this are metal and stone ornaments (jewellery) which, Simmel suggests, are entirely un-individual and whose “elegance lies in their impersonality”. He also states that between these two is dress that is not so “inexchangeable and personal as tattooing”. It can then be argued that lace unlike other fabrics, due to its open work structure to reveal the skin, is situated in a unique position on the body, between dress and the body. It does not sit directly on the skin like tattoos with no movement, and it does not conceal the body like cloth; it inhabits a unique intermediate position that has the potential to emanate symbolic meanings associated with power and sexuality. This intimate position is recognised in the Japanese Eastern culture as ‘Ma’. The space is viewed to be more than a void but a “rich space that possesses incalculable energy” (Fukai, 2010: 16). This energy could then interpret the power of lace fabric, to open a dialogue of meaning and association that has resonated in fashion since the turn of the twentieth century, enabling women to openly and powerfully reveal themselves sexually.

The intimate connection of skin and lace is based on the interaction with the body and pattern that creates a form of body art, enhancing the attributes of the figure in delicate shapes and structures. Designer Alexander McQueen referred to lace as a sophisticated form of tattooing (McQueen, in: *Vogue*, July issue, 2008), reinforcing the idea of the personal and private space it occupies. The movement of the lace cloth creates a sensuous sight, providing glimpses of the skin that are triggered by the actions of the wearer, the inter-concealing and exposing of the body simultaneously creating a visual display.

The visibility of the female form through adornment has been a significant trigger for the objectification of women. The ancient Greek word *Kosmas* is the origin of the word 'cosmetic', meaning 'adornment', especially feminine adornment (Araujo, 2010). In McEwen's essay 'Socrates ancestor: an essay on architectural beginnings' (1993), the meaning of *Kosmas* is explored further in relation to the feminine. *Chros* ('skin' or 'colour') is the Homeric word for the living body, which was understood by the Greeks as surface and the bearer of visibility. The Greeks believed that when a woman adorned herself she clothed herself in a second skin or body: "if women in ancient Greece, were essentially invisible, cosmetic *Kosmas* made them visible" (McEwen, 1993: 44–45). Again, the naked body does not create the desire; it is the concealment through adornment that makes the woman erotically visible and objectified.

Clothes add a mystery to the body that makes it more provocative, while nakedness can be seen as uninteresting and not sexy (Entwistle, 2000: 181), determining that women's bodies appear only to be significantly visible when adorned. Erotic appeal through clothing the body is not restricted to Western culture; Sumbanese women become exchangeable commodities that are erotically charged through the wearing of cloth that has been decorated with symbolic motifs (Hoskins, in: Weiner and Schneider, 1989). The motifs and cloth first cover and enclose her, then later through the act of tattooing they are transferred to her skin. She represents the wealth that must be given by her husband's ancestral village; she becomes objectified through cloth (Hoskins, in: Weiner and Schneider, 1989: 158).

Although the attire in the West may be different from the Sumbanese clothing in construction, the objectification through dress remains the same; de Beauvoir drew our attention to this, stating, 'that since a woman is an object, it is quite understandable that her intrinsic value is affected by her style of dress and adornment' (de Beauvoir, 1997: 458). The visibility of women is often heavily defined by appearance and exterior façade, allowing for her to be judged visually determining her standing in society.

Naomi Schor draws our attention to the thoughts of Adolf Loos, the Viennese architect, art critic and author of the seminal article *Ornament and Crime* (1908), when determining the attitude of men to women and dress. Loos' observations at the turn of the twentieth century suggest that women cover their bodies in rich adornments to attract a "big strong man" if she is to hold her own as an equal. He suggests that men are repelled by the naked female body, which in turn forces the woman to "fetishise herself because of the inherent perversion of male desire"

(Loos, 1908, in: Schor, 1987: 52). He believes that the visibility of women to be seen as an equal can only be achieved when women relinquish their refinery and achieve economic equal status with men. This attitude to dress then suggests that types of clothes change the way we look at the body and how we emotionally feel about the person wearing the clothes, which further suggests that different types of fabric and how we wear them have the potential to be more sexually charged than others.

Lace: fetishism

This section investigates the idea of fetishism in relation to lace, and the power of cloth to excite and induce sexual reaction. Entwistle suggests that the obvious illustration of the connection between adornment and sexuality is fetishism (Entwistle, 2000: 191). The term 'fetishism' has three meanings⁵, each with intellectual traditions. The meaning with immediate significance to this text is that which is rooted in psychology, sexology and psychoanalysis. Krafft-Ebing, the nineteenth century sexologist, defined fetishism as "The Association of Lust with the idea of Certain Portions of the Female Person, or with Certain Articles of Female Attire" (Steele, 1996: 11). Clothing and adornment can then be connected with the way in which individuals become associated with sexual feelings (Entwistle, 2000: 192). Steele (1996: 5) notes that Alfred Binet and Richard von Krafft-Ebing were the first psychologists to categorise the idea of sexual fetishism. Krafft-Ebing defined the terms 'sadism' (after the Marquis de Sade) and 'masochism' (after Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, author of the classic novel *Venus in Furs*) (Steele, 1996: 5). The expansion of the meaning created an interconnectivity that relates sexuality, power and perception.

Objects and people become sexualised, including clothing, shoes, hair and fabric, with certain materials having more appeal than others for the individual. Steele argues that some fabrics have a "powerful erotic appeal by virtue of their tactile, olfactory, and visual characteristics as well as their symbolic associations" (Steele,

⁵ Fetishism has three meanings in three different intellectual traditions. It was originally used in anthropology to describe a sacred object that was thought to have special powers in a particular community. Karl Marx then used it to describe objects that become commodities under capitalism, the values and meanings put on these objects can then be referred to as 'commodity fetishism' where an object has gained 'sex appeal'. The third meaning comes from psychology, sexology and psychoanalysis, where an object becomes associated with sexual feelings in order for a person to become sexually aroused (Entwistle, 2000:191–192).

1996: 143). Freud would argue that the fetishisation of objects happens in the process of child development and that these fetishes stand in for the 'lost' phallus of the mother (Entwistle, 2000:193). Freud, Gammon and Makinen all believe that it is important to distinguish between the levels of fetishism. Anthropologist and sexologist Paul Gebhard defined and analysed fetishism as having four stages or levels⁶, which help define the differences between a fetish style or look and the wearing or touch of certain garments to produce sexual feelings.

Fetishism is often seen as a male desire rather than female. Timothy Edward states that "from heels and lingerie to uniforms and corsets, almost all of the most commonplace examples of fetishism are female that are in turn fetishised exclusively as part of male desire not female" (Edwards, 2011: 75). Edwards argues that women, too, have fetish desires that are often hidden but still remain. His examples reflect the desire for men in uniform or a well-cut suit, both being evidence of female fetishism. Gammon and Makinen argue further that women actively engage in fetish behaviour in various ways, including eating, and that they willingly participate in fetish activities (Gammon and Makinen, in: Edwards, 2011). This desire to participate can be argued to illustrate the relationship women have with fetishism. The desire and eroticised fantasy of sexual feelings that can be imbued by the very wearing of lace incites erotic tension that is created while engaging in a role-play of the desirer and the desired.

Fashion is often drawn to aspects of sexual desire. The 1970s experienced the Punk Rock movement that embraced S&M and the wearing of fetishistic clothing. The 1990s saw a blurring of definitions, in which fetish wear became part of the norm on the catwalk, and PVC and rubber were no longer seen as 'deviant' and 'perverse' (Arnold, 2001: 77). The dressing of the body entered a highly complex web of desires and associated sexuality that could be determined by women in the mainstream. Gammon and Makinen state that in Western culture women's relationship with fashion appears to be fetishistic, or at least fixed on certain parts of

⁶ The levels, as set out by Paul Gebhard:

Level one: preference for certain type of sex partner, stimulus or activity akin to Freud's idea of 'normal love'.

Level two: strong preference for certain kinds of partners or activities.

Level three: specific stimuli are necessary for sexual activity and when such objects are needed in order to experience sexual gratification.

Level four: specific stimuli take the place of the sex partner, which is fetishism of the most extreme kind (Entwistle, 2000:193).

the body (Gammon and Makinen 1994, in: Edwards, 2011: 77). Culture invests sexual meaning in the female body; women have become aware of the potential power of body dressing as 'sexual trophies' that can enhance sex appeal (Entwistle, 2000: 186). The appropriation of lace in clothing in our current culture can enable a woman to openly demonstrate her sexual feelings and desires; through the materiality of lace a desire is created to expose parts of the body that would otherwise be covered.

The power of clothing to convey feelings and desires was examined by Flugel on a complex level and influenced by Freud and his clothing-related essays including *Fetishism* (1927) and *The Interpretation of Dreams* which included his propensity for items of clothing to symbolize human genitalia. Flugel thought about clothing on a deeper level that involved the human psyche: "Clothes..... though seemingly mere extraneous appendages have entered into the very core of our existence as social beings" (Flugel 1930, in: Carter 2003: 16). The contemporary role of clothing in our society is more than just protection, warmth or for our modesty; it can have powerful implications when displaying who we are to others, reflecting our innermost feelings and fantasies.

The darker side of fashion is indicated through the work of fashion designers Iris Van Herpen (Figure 17) and Alexander McQueen (Figure 18); both suggest fetishistic practices in their collections. Masks that completely cover and restrict the view of the face are used, offering a sinister take on fashion that is restrictive and controlling.

Communication through clothing can often be complex and difficult to define. Not all women want to be noticed through dress and often the experience can be far from empowering. Sophie Woodward argues that women dress according to a variety of factors that are determined by the parameters of the individual; dressing involves "the tension between un-thought-out embodied self that women enact daily and the possibilities and potentials of who they think they could be" (Woodward, 2007:131).



Figure 17: Iris Van Herpen, *Mumification*, 2009, leather, eyelets and lace.



Figure 18: Alexander McQueen, *Dante*, Autumn-Winter collection 1996/7.

Woodward's ethnographical study of women in London and Nottingham and their assemblage of dress found that the relationship between the internal and external self was prevalent. Clothing played a strategic part in the woman's well being and exposed an inhibited self. It prevented them from becoming the "kind of self they would otherwise have wished to construct, let alone influence anyone else" (Woodward, 2007: 22). The use of clothing would then suggest that the intention by women to communicate a sexual encounter could be misread. The subtle interchanges of fashion, fabric and styles allow for a mixed interpretation that can be ambiguous and difficult to interpret. The choice to wear lace as clothing can be argued to have an intentionality through the very intimate materiality and sexual

activity and desires connected with it. These associations charge the fabric with sexual meaning before it even becomes a worn garment.

Conclusion

Lace themes and structures of lace are visible in many aspects of current art and design. Artists and designers are choosing to work with lace to utilise the evocative and suggestive nature of the material to transform, manipulate and demonstrate lace in new ways. Art practitioners are using themes that incorporate ideas around gender including domesticity, sexuality and erotica, whilst designers are reinterpreting intricate structures of lace exploring and subverting materials that challenge the traditional construction of lace.

The duality of lace to attract and repel has offered artists an opportunity to play with a dual way of seeing, embracing the good and bad associations that are connected to lace historically. My interests lie in the evocative and powerful interplay of lace themes to captivate and confront the audience with the decorative and uncomfortable at a sensual and visceral level.

My historical research started with clothing and the connection lace has with cycles of fashion, developing an interest in the close connection it has with skin and the body. I have discovered that it does not fit the stereotypical short fashion cycle, but has formed an unconventional trajectory that surpasses the fashionable and which has undergone a rapid and varied reinvention of value and form. It is not just a theme or trend in the fashion calendar, and has been repeatedly used to portray varied styles over a sustained period of time.

The important shift and transformation to encompass more than just status and position in society has enabled lace to be recognised as a fabric that adds a sexual charge to garments through the symbiotic relationship between skin when worn as a single layer. The fundamental construction has remained the same since it evolved in the sixteenth century. The delicate open weave construction of twisted and knotted threads creates a mapping of motifs that are still evident in fabric today. The dramatic change in meaning is only understood when a comparative study of the social and political changes happening at the time of the rejuvenation of lace is analysed.

The reinvention of lace as a single layer of fabric became apparent in the 1960s, reflecting the desire by women to adopt a fabric that displayed changes that were happening in the Western world. The independence and sexual freedom of women was expressed through clothing, playing a key role in the communication of self-expression. This desire was then re-appropriated by the media and the

'pornographication' of the female form was freely evident in women's magazines, aiding the sexualisation and social construction of women as objectified beings.

Through this research I have established that the postmodern construction of lace has three significant areas that challenge and define the popularity and allure of lace fabric: 'reveal and conceal', adornment and fetishism. Each section of this chapter that addresses these areas demonstrates the significance of lace and contributes to the understanding of the materiality of lace to attract attention, visibility and power. The unusual construction of lace engages the viewer in a curious display of veiled and uncovered skin, creating a provocative striptease, infusing the spectacle with sexuality. It could be argued that other fabrics also offer this enticement and suggestive attributes; sheer fabric like silk chiffon also has a revealing quality, offering a sensual display of the silhouette of the body. However, lace reveals the actuality of the skin, encased in decorative fragmented patterns, exposing our personal and intimate boundary between our sensory body and the outside world. Lace inhabits a distinctive and provocative position on the body that entices energy and creates a powerful visual dialogue between those who observe it and those who wear it. It enables women, if they so choose, to openly and powerfully be sexually revealing.

This powerful interplay and the journey of re-appropriation that lace has encountered has highlighted areas of importance when analysing the change in associations; gender, beauty and sexuality all resonate strongly as overriding themes that can be explored through my practice to create new work. The following chapter further explores methods associated with action research through the implementation of case studies. This process intimately considers the practice of other artists and designers to gain a deeper and more insightful knowledge of concept development that is in turn used to reflect on my own way of working.

Chapter Three: Case Studies

Introduction

Once I had gained a general understanding of artists and designers who use lace in their work, I wanted to get closer and make connections with them. The method of case studies was chosen as a suitable way of establishing a relationship with artists and designers and which could achieve an insight into their thought process. I put together a list of potential studies of people whose work I found interesting and which covered a broad spectrum of creative practice including fine art, craft, design and fashion. This, I hope, will enable a clearer understanding of the breadth of potential connections and themes of lace and offer a wider perspective on the interest and use of lace to transmit concepts. For each artist and designer, multiple sources of evidence are gathered within the case study framework. These include a variety of recorded interviews, visual essays, student focus groups, magazine articles, exhibition visits and academic essays. These multiple sources of evidence help to develop the inquiry and create “converging lines of enquiry” that are said by Robert Yin to form a more compelling study (Yin, 2009:117).

Interviews were adopted as the most appropriate way to gather material directly from the artists and designers. Grant McCracken suggests that “for certain descriptive and analytic purposes, no instrument of inquiry is more revealing” and has the ability to take us into “the mental world of the individual” (McCracken, 1988: 9). My own knowledge and experience as an artist contributes to the connection made with the case studies and enables a clear assimilation of information and evidence.

McCracken determines that the investigator must use the whole of one’s experience and imagination in order to be successful and to find a match for the patterns of evidence that help uncover the emergence of parallels (McCracken, 1988: 19).

Interviews were conducted using techniques that were both structured and open-ended and were often performed in the studio space of the artist.

A series of analytical processes is carried out to interpret the information gathered from the interviews. An approach drawn from grounded theory of ‘line by line coding’ is used, which provides an unbiased method that maintains objectivity in the analysis of the interview. Graham Gibbs states that the process of line by line coding forces analytical thinking whilst keeping close contact with the data recorded (Gibbs, 2007: 52). It is important to resist putting my own already-formed ideas or theories forward when analysing the interviews. The process of breaking down the written transcript

into numbered lines instigates individual analysis that helps my process of reflection to concentrate on the experiences of the case studies rather than my own. Analysis of words, phrases and sentences is also carried out in accordance with Gibbs (2010), highlighting notable words and phrases and allowing for significant connections to emerge that initially might not have been obvious.

Selection of artist and designers

My selection criteria emerged through the contextual research carried out as part of the initial study to find artists that engaged with lace on a level that expresses overriding themes in their practice. It is vital that lace has played a significant role at some point in their career. It is also important that they were established and recognized in their field so that I can make informed analytical decisions on more than just an interview. This also enables the gathering of multiple sources of evidence including exhibitions, magazine articles, academic papers, reviews and online digital media platforms. This prevents a biased opinion forming and enables a study that uses the views of others to create a complete study.

Practical issues of contact also played a part in the selection. It was crucial that I could meet the artist in person to establish a relationship of trust to allow the practitioner to reveal their thoughts and feelings through a face-to-face interview process. It was also important to be able to visit them in their studio to observe their surroundings and way of working to highlight further insights of the mental world of the practitioner. Once a selection criterion was created, I started to contact artists for potential case studies.

The first person I approached was Australian textile artist Cecilia Heffer. I had heard her talk at Archive Fever 2 at Goldsmiths University, London (2008) and became interested in her connection between historical lace and contemporary artworks. Her work had also involved working with Nottingham Lace machines in Ayrshire, Scotland, and she had visited the NTU lace archive following contact at the symposium. I was fortunate to meet her again at a Science and Heritage Research Cluster – Understanding Complex Structures: the conversation, display and interpretation of lace and natural objects (June, 2009) in Nottingham. This opened an opportunity to employ her for a case study and interview her that weekend at my studio in Nottingham. A second interview was then carried out at a private address in Byron Bay, Australia while on a family holiday in August 2010.

In June 2009 I made contact with fashion designer Pearl Lowe, who was using vintage lace to create new contemporary clothing collections. Unfortunately, after a number of email exchanges, we were not able to meet due to her busy schedule.

In December 2009 I contacted Danica Maier, an artist and part-time Fine Art lecturer at NTU. Her work had interested me for some time and I was intrigued by her use of craft processes and lace materials, combined with graphic sexual imagery. I interviewed her in March 2010 and January 2011 at her Lincolnshire studio.

I contacted Catherine Berola in January 2010. Berola is an artist who had often worked with archives and who has a particular interest in gender and heritage. I interviewed her at a cafe in Newcastle in February 2010 but unfortunately she was not happy for me to visit her studio. A second interview happened a year later in January (2011).

Case studies had been established in areas of fine art and design but not fashion, so I contacted hat designer Philip Tracey who had just worked with fashion designer Valentino on a collection for London Fashion week (2010) that incorporated lace shoes and hats. Unfortunately his commitments were too great at this time to be interviewed.

In February 2010 I interviewed Elena Corchero, director of Lost Values, at her studio in Cockpit Arts, London. Her work fitted a design/craft element, with a practice that combines traditional craft with new technology. Her philosophy is to create environmentally friendly products that encompass craft techniques and new technology while still creating a look that is familiar and accessible. Her products are generally for women. Her objectives are to soften technology and take away the hard edge and robust nature that seems to be associated with it and create a historical reference point that offers a more decorative alternative. Corchero's creation of LFLECT, a reflective thread that illuminates when strong light hits it, has the ability to transform the way we see textiles in the evening or night. Lost Values have applied the thread as part of the structure to traditional crafts of knitting and lace. Lost values is about celebrating craft while embracing new technology, moving it forward so that it is relevant today. Lace is used as an opportunity to apply the thread in another application. Corchero associates lace with "mathematics, technique, memory and high skill" and wants to apply this to her work. The lace that has been produced with the use of reflective thread is a simple copy of ribbon lace that can be bought by the metres to customise garments. Although the material used was innovative, I felt that the use of lace was due to its availability and simple application, and could have

been applied to a number of other materials. Lace was only significant because it was a suitable fit and made links with craft rejuvenation. I therefore decided that I would not use Lost Values as part of the study.

In the autumn of 2010 I contacted a number of prestigious fashion houses with the hope that I would be able to gain an interview with leading designers using lace in their collections. My research had made a distinctive turn towards lace on the body, so to have direct contact with a fashion designer would be advantageous.

Unfortunately I was unsuccessful and had to look closer to home for someone that was more easily accessible.

I was made aware of Claire Harris, a lecturer in fashion marketing at Nottingham Trent University and owner of Trash Blooms, a company project whose work engages the wider community using fashion and textiles. I did an initial interview with Harris in October 2010 in the café at NTU, to gain an understanding of her broad involvement with a number of projects both in Nottingham and Coventry. Harris's work covered a wide spectrum of disciplines including fashion, textiles, fashion communication, fashion marketing and industrial design. This first interview offered me a taste and breadth of her expertise. I met up with her again in December 2010 in a meeting room at NTU to discuss her work in more depth. Lace had been used by Harris on a number of occasions in various projects she had worked on. An example of this is *Stitch in Time* (2009), a Heritage Lottery Funded Young Roots project focusing on creative art and fashion to engage young people in traditional heritage textiles and contemporary customised fashion. For Harris, Lace fitted the heritage criteria of her projects, and her preoccupation with vintage clothes and fabrics guided her choices of selection. I was not convinced that lace held any particular poignant associations and was used by her like any other fabric under the 'vintage' label. Her connection to fashion design was also limited, so I therefore decided not to use her as one of the case studies.

Further discussions with my director of studies led to a debate on the gender of my current chosen artists for the case studies. My selection had only included women and we felt that the input from a man using a predominantly gender-related fabric would add interesting findings to the study. Craft maker Shane Waltener was contacted and I interviewed him in December 2010 at his studio in London. I was interested in his use of hand lace making techniques to create artworks and installations.

I decided that for my fashion case study I would approach Elaine Bell, a mature student who already had a business selling vintage textiles and was coming to the end of degree in Fashion Design and Innovation. I had worked with her in the lace archive and was impressed with the way in which she had applied her time spent working in the archive to produce her final catwalk collection. I interviewed her in June 2011 in the NTU lace archive and decided that her connection to lace and fashion would offer an interesting contrast to the other case studies. I was then left with five practitioners that covered area of fine art, fashion, textile design and craft.

Interview process

I approached the interview process through a series of structured questions, following a similar format for each practitioner. I researched each practitioner through articles, exhibition catalogues and websites, making note of particular artworks/designs that had attracted my interest so that I could start the interview in the area that fulfilled my research criteria. The questions were simple and generic but I hoped that they would engage the artists in a conversation that would deal directly with the issues I needed. This structure was not followed rigidly and I allowed for the interview process to flow organically once the initial questions had been asked. An example of the 1st question sheet for Danica Maier can be seen in Appendix 1.

The first interview was analysed through a variety of methods including line by line coding and word and phrase selection to allow for connections and parallels to be made. For artists whom I was able to interview for a second time, I prepared a second structured interview that specifically dealt with issues raised at the previous interview. I included quotations that I wanted more explanation on to and pinpointed areas and themes that connected areas of interest. However, the second interview was not governed by the question list and was followed more loosely, allowing the artists to take the lead and to feel comfortable to expand on points that had arisen from our conversation. An example of the 2nd interview question sheet and annotated interview for Danica Maier can be seen in Appendices 2 & 3.

The next section introduces the case studies individually, setting each of them in the context of current contemporary practice. Important themes are highlighted from the interviews and analysed in the context of the study. The following section addresses the attempt for a deeper understanding of the practice of Catherine Bertola and Danica Maier. This was achieved through the methods of cross case synthesis and a process of visual mapping. Images chosen by the artists are also used with two focus groups allowing for triangulation to achieve an analysis that takes into consideration

the views of others. The chapter concludes with an overall view of the findings and their contribution to the research.

Danica Maier

1st Interview 05/03/2010 – 1.49pm (50 min) studio Lincoln

2nd interview 21/01/11 – 3pm (1 hr 38min) studio Lincoln

Danica Maier graduated from Goldsmiths College London in 2002 with an MA in Textiles in Contemporary Art Practice. Her work involves using traditional craft techniques and textile references to articulate ideas around domesticity, gender and sexuality. Maier's work has been shown nationally including London Printworks, London (2005), Angel Row Gallery, Nottingham (2007) and the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, and internationally including Vox Populi gallery, USA (2001), Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, Pakistan (2004) and 'Textile' 05 & 07, Lithuania.

Lace has been present in Maier's work since 2002. A number of her installations use vintage lace ribbon pinned onto walls to form 3D drawings of multiple outlines of figurative images taken from pornography. The works include *Crown and Feathers* (2004), *Horizontal Rumba* (2004–05), *The Parting of the Red Sea* (2004) and *Have Lunch Downtown* (2005) (Figure 20). In 2005 she was the artist in residence with the Museo del Barro, Asuncion, Paraguay, working with local women who made Nanduti lace. This work culminated in an exhibition entitled *Intraducible* (2005) (Figure 19), which toured to the Universidad UNIACC Gallery, Santiago, Chile, and the Constance Howard Resource and Research Centre, London. In 2009 she was contacted and commissioned by the German women's organisation GEDOK in Karlsruhe, Germany. GEDOK specifically selected Maier as an artist who works with lace to create an artwork that celebrated a forty-year town partnership with Nottingham. Maier produced *Midlands and Tooraloorals* (2009), an installation that took inspiration from motifs found in the Nottingham Trent University Lace archive.

Maier cleverly uses the seduction of textiles and decoration to engage the viewer with familiar reference points that attract a second look. Hidden in the patterns are explicit images and words that are revealed or concealed depending on the experiences and understanding of the viewer. When interviewing Danica Maier, I was interested in establishing the reasoning behind the hidden sexual dialogue and images that are characteristic of her work and how lace may have played a part in conveying them. Maier talked of the significance of the 'counter' and double side of

things, indicating the importance of instigating a questioning of objects. When looking at her work it is evident when engaging with her strong use of pattern and craft processes that often she subverts our vision for us to experience the unexpected. When talking about her work involving Laura Ashley prints, she explains the 'counter' and double sided of things. This is illustrated when she describes how she hopes to engage with her audience:

I am kind of quite interested in people also coming in and saying oh god it's a bunch of lace, but because they are having that counter association to what I am completely playing with and then they might actually enjoy that there is something else going on there, but then I am hoping that this also counters the associations they have with the lace, sort of switching it back so it changes their expectations.

From our first interview it was made clear that her work is strongly associated with sex and the use of pornography. Her relationship with lace is clearly defined and categorised as drawing from opposite associations. Maier interprets associations of lace by colour, stating "black lace tends to be for the sexualisation of women or something sexy", which, she is quick to say, does not particularly interest her or plays a part in her work. The pastel shades of lace ribbon she chooses are 'counter' to the pornographic imagery. Lace for Maier is about the 'proper side' or 'nice side' that she describes as the "lace collar, the little ruffled pants that girls wear". It also represents the "cute, pretty and lovely and harks back to the handmade".

Although her work has explicit themes and imagery of sex, Maier has strong views on lace underwear and the associations linked with it. She states,

I have a complete dislike for the lace underwear stuff, this sort of sexy, which is meant to be sexy I don't find it that way, I find it crude, I suppose I have very crude associations with it in terms of I suppose prostitution, because it's a stereotype of what is meant to be sexualized therefore I don't really find that interesting.

This distinction of the two sides of lace underpins ideas found in her work that balance the domestic and decorative with the subversive and unspoken. The direct intention of Maier is not to portray lace as sexual, but for the viewer this connection may appear intentional and adds to a duality of meaning linking lace with the innocent and sweet and the subversive and taboo. When talking of her own associations of lace to curtains, lace doilies etc., she points out the underlying duality:

So it's all of that side of lace that when I am using it I am particularly interested in which is why I think I use a particular type and particular colours because it's not about just

making something that has a an immediate association to something sexy or raunchy and the imagery is raunchy, it really is about the balancing of two things.

The influence of lace in Maier's work comes from historical connection through family and the inherited remnants and saved pieces of clothing collected by her grandmother. These scraps represent a grandmother whom Maier describes as a "strong woman" who was a mother of two with "independence and a job". However, Maier believes that if her grandmother saw her work today it might not "translate back through the generations". The close family connections suggest a possible reason why lace suggests for her 'propriety' and 'purity' rather than what appears to be a more obvious connection with sexuality. However, lace is still used to seduce the viewer, enticing them to enter what appears to be familiar and comfortable environment. Maier plays with our constructions of the everyday to initiate a questioning of reality.

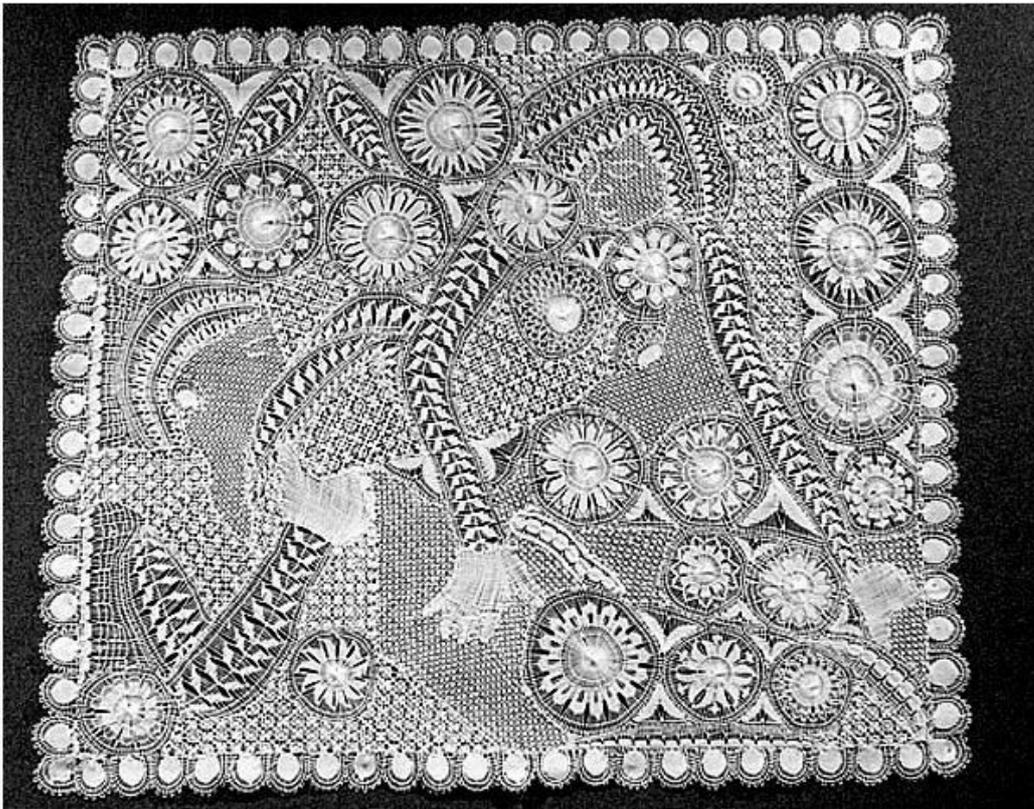


Figure 19: Danica Maier, *Intraducible*, 2005, Nanduti lace, Paraguay.

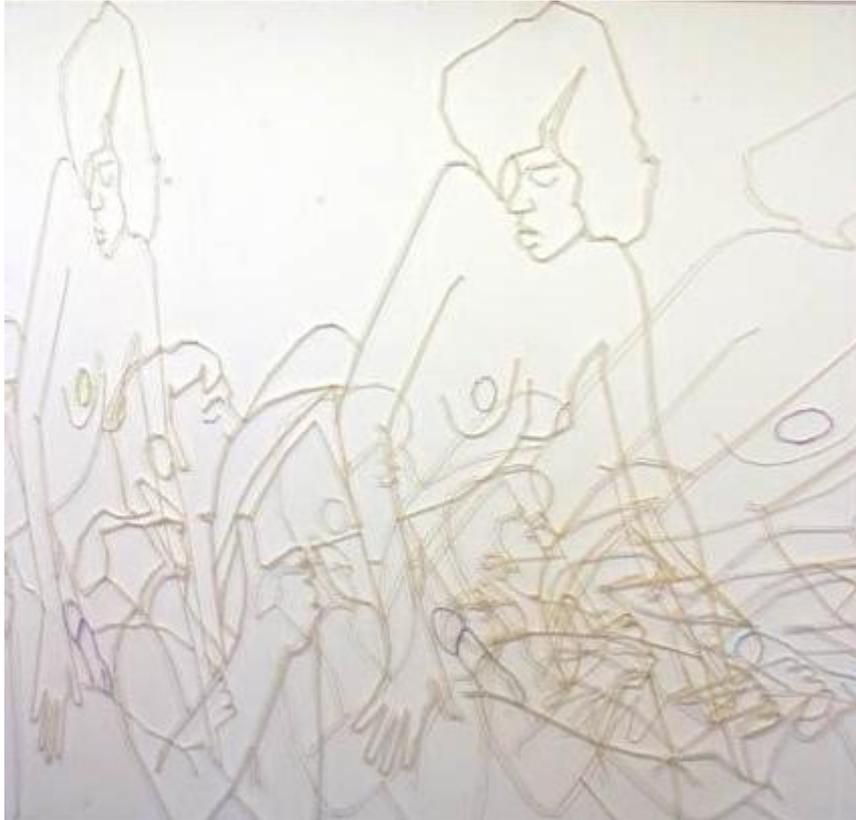


Figure 20: Danica Maier, *Have Lunch Downtown*, 2005, lace ribbon and straight pins, 20ft x 8ft x 1in, London.

Shane Waltener

Interview 08/12/2010 10.35am (1hr 35min) studio London

Shane Waltener is an artist and a craftsman (Figure 21). He makes installations, artworks and interventions that engage with the viewer through processes of handcraft. He is passionate about making and creating narratives between the people who interact and take part in his work through workshops. He studied sculpture at Camberwell College of Art, then at La Cambre Institute, Brussels, and learnt textile and sewing processes. Techniques of lace-making, basketry and knitting are all integral parts of his practice.

He started working with lace techniques in 2003 after the London College of Fashion inherited patterns from an obsessive needlecrafter. These patterns instigated his exploration of making lace. His first outcome was *Aunty Peggy has Departed* (2003) (Figure 23), an installation at a disused tube station in London that also included a sound piece. Lace doilies became a recurring presence in his work, appearing in a redundant shoe factory *Show Room Doily* (2004) (Figure 22) and surrounding the

Chihuly chandelier in the entrance of the Victoria and Albert Museum. A series of webs were also created from nylon fishing line and suspended in a church yard at the Museum of Garden History, London. The nylon thread appeared and disappeared according to the light and the position of the viewer creating an ethereal presence. His series of *World Wide Webs* installations, have graced international exhibitions including *Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting* (2007) at the Museum of Art & Design, New York, USA and *Love Lace* (2011) at Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia.

Waltener was interviewed in his London studio, surrounded by art pieces both finished and unfinished and by collections of materials used for his group work and his individual contemplations. I was initially interested in his thoughts on men making lace, but when this subject was approached it was dismissed and made clear that lace is just another process to explore and does not hold any special significance other than it is a craft process. When talking about the lace in his work he describes it as a weaving process:

It's all about making knots in one way or another and tying things together and creating a history through the physical connection between things, it's between people but it's also between materials and how it is put together by a community of people.

He was also keen to make clear that men are and have always been involved in the making of lace and to think otherwise is incorrect, saying that "It is a myth that men don't knit or crochet." He proceeds to tell tales of fishermen making nets, men knitting in the war effort and Cypriot soldiers establishing a cottage industry that made doilies. However he does acknowledge that there is generally a stigma associated with these particular crafts techniques in relation to men.

The process of making dominates Waltener's practice. He is self-taught and his skills include knitting, basket weave, crochet and sugar craft, which are all used as methods to explore the construction of objects. His work embraces his own explorations of craft techniques and also workshops that include the wider community which he encourages to contribute skills and share knowledge.. Waltener uses processes like knitting and lace-making to create networks that join threads and people together.

The communities created through his workshops play a significant role in the act of making and sharing; he describes it as "making some connections that will create some kind of narrative". The narrative, however, is not seen by him as a way of gathering stories. His position is clearly to facilitate the process of making an

exchange between his participants possible. The finished product does not play a central role even with his own work and he is reluctant to deliberately make things in durable materials. He thinks that it is important not to “eternize on the value and uniqueness of an object”.

His thoughts however change when considering the present day resurgence of craft and the act of making. In our current culture, he thinks that people in this economic climate are “valuing time and doing things for ‘its own sake’ and also reusing things and making do with what they have”. When I asked whether he thinks that people are valuing time, he replied:

the interest in craft and making pre dates the crash so it's some form of resistance as well as a political dimension to it, it's about resisting the commercialism and capitalism and not wanting to be part of that economic system.

Lace for Waltner is another craft that fits into his skill base, which leads him to the value of lace as an act of making developing hand skills and engaging the wider community to share knowledge.



Figure 21: Shane Waltner, Artist's Studio, 2010, London.



Figure 22: Shane Waltener, *Showroom Doily*, 2004, knicker elastic, 350 x 300 x 350 cm, disused shoe factory, Kings Cross, London.



Figure 23: Shane Waltener, *Aunty Peggy Has Departed*, 2003, mercerised cotton, Aldwych Tube Station, London.

Cecilia Heffer

1st interview 13/05/2010 2.45pm (1hr 10min) my studio Nottingham

2nd interview 21/08/2010 3.17pm (1hr.46min) private address Byron Bay, Australia

Cecilia Heffer studied painting and textiles at the National Art School, Sydney, Australia in 1982. She gained a postgraduate Diploma in 1990) and a Masters in textiles at Central Saint Martins, London in 1993. Heffer has worked as a textile designer in leading studios in London and New York, including Timney Fowler, with her designs appearing for Liberty, Jaeger and Calvin Klein. She is currently senior lecturer and Director of Program in Fashion and Textiles at the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia. Her work takes aspects of historical lace to create contemporary interpretations that explore the boundaries between technologies and traditional textile practice. Exploring the structural qualities of lace, Heffer creates new geometrics and systems that explore the physical dimension of lace.

In 2005 she was commissioned by the Australia Arts Council Board to explore contemporary translations of lace from an historic source. The solo exhibition *Laced* (2006) (Figure 24), which explored her translations of contemporary lace, was also funded by the Australia Council, which led her in 2007 to design contemporary lace curtains for the state rooms, Government House, Sydney. Through her fascination with structures, Heffer created *Hyperbolic Lace* (2009) (Figure 25) which explores geometric structural surfaces as a means to investigate future lace possibilities. Her Solo show, *Lace Narratives* (2010) (Figure 26), carried on the theme of structures but also introduced a journey of self-reflection and cultural identity.

Her latest project, a collaboration with Bert Bongers, titled *Interlace* (2011), was produced as part of the International Lace Award (2011) for the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney and received a Highly Commended award. It engages with digital media to produce an interactive sensory video lace installation. Heffer and Bongers transform traditional indications of lace into a three dimensional environment through the process of video technology.

Her initial experience of lace started in the Powerhouse museum Lace Study Centre, which she approached with a limited knowledge of lace but a strong interest in fabric manipulation. Lace offered her the capacity and means to explore new structural potentials and describes the reason for her interest in it because of the “ethereal qualities and see through structure, pattern and delicacy” of lace. Her mentorship with lace expert and maker Rosemary Shepherd challenged Heffer to learn the process of making bobbin lace and the history behind lace as an art form.

Heffer’s background in design and print appears to draw her to the structural qualities of lace rather than the social and sexual concepts that lace often inspires. The

structure has influenced her to recreate a contemporary semblance that draws from the configuration of thread and encapsulated motifs. Shepherd's definition of lace as "a decorative openwork fabric in which the pattern of the spaces is as important as the solid areas" (Shepherd, 2003) is described by Heffer as "conceptually underpinning all her work". Heffer's aim is to combine the historical connection that lace makes with textile practice and the potential of new interpretations through the introduction of contemporary processes when talking of her process she excites in the future possibilities of lace construction: "I am interested in the intersection between emerging technologies and traditional textile practice with an aim to create new lace possibilities."

When commissioned to make a contemporary lace curtain for Government House, Sydney, Australia (2007), Heffer's response had a more traditional approach. Drawings depicting the flora and fauna of Australia were used and woven on traditional lace looms by the last Nottingham Lace curtain manufacturers in the UK, Morton, Young and Borland Textile Group, Scotland. Her subsequent work has been of a more experimental nature but is still dominated by the structure of lace and the process of making rather than the conceptual and metaphorical constructions of lace. She describes her work as focusing on constructions of space as a means to identify form while exploring an interplay between positive and negative space, between the interface, the background and the foreground.

When asked in her first interview whether she would use lace as starting point, again she was quick to answer 'yes' and explain her new work for a future solo show, *Lace Narratives* (2010):

I am using lace as a metaphor for place. I continue to explore the definition of lace as an open work fabric whereby the pattern of spaces is as important as the solid motif. In lace we construct a pattern of spaces as a means to identify form. As individuals we identify ourselves by the spaces between objects, in order to understand our own story we notice the differences, the spaces between ourselves and others. Lace I feel is a metaphor for understanding our country, place in the world and sense of belonging.

The presence of lace in Heffer's work is a starting point and stimulus, drawing from the material and structural qualities of lace to create constructions that play with space and light. Heffer's relationship with lace appears to be an aesthetic one that links up her past in design with a new engagement to create artworks. Heffer builds structures and shapes through patterns drawn from her love of lace fabric, craft process and new technology. It does not challenge the viewer to question; instead it

presents an aesthetic and inviting interpretation of lace that draws from the historical structures of lace but is formed by the technology of the present.



Figure 24: Cecilia Heffer, *White Shadow* (detail), 2006, silk organza, Venetian hand printed braid patterns, machine stitching, 60 x 3m

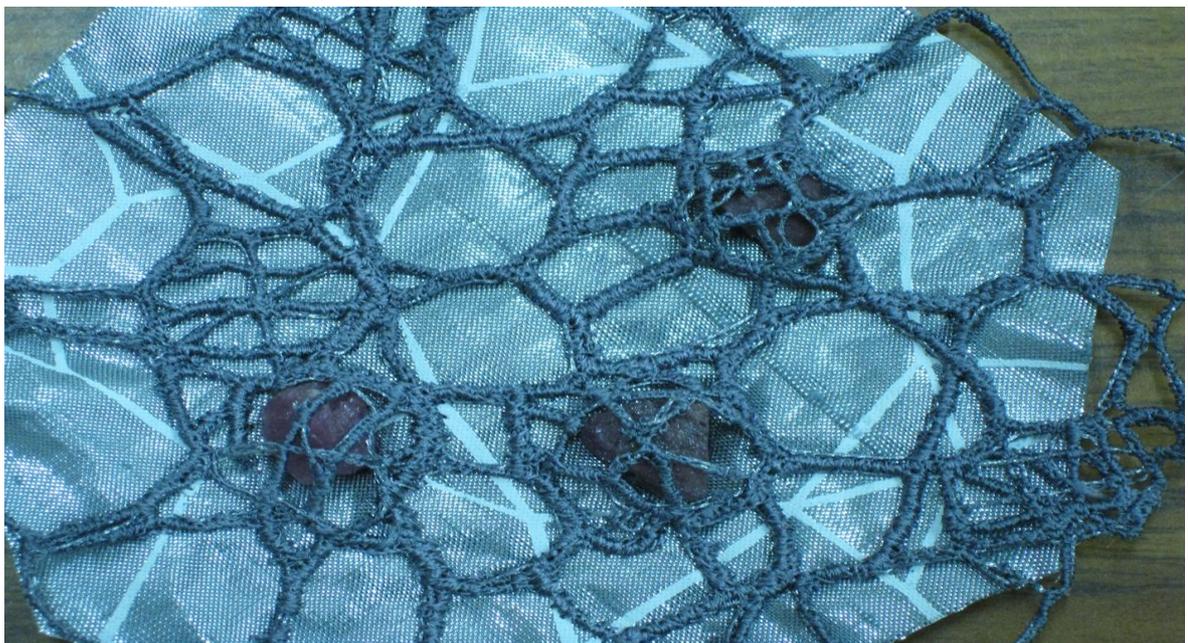


Figure 25: Cecilia Heffer, *Hyperbolic Lace* (detail), 2009, machine and hand embroidered, silk thread, pebbles, nylon.



Figure 26: Cecilia Heffer , *Art-20*, 2010, photographic transfer, silk linen, machine stitching on a soluble substrate, 12 x 14 cm.

Catherine Bertola

1st Interview 09/02/2010 10.30am (1hr 14min) cafe Newcastle

2nd Interview 17/01/2011 09.21am (1hr 4min) cafe Newcastle

Catherine Bertola graduated from Newcastle University in 1999 with a BA (Hons) in Fine Art. She has had a number of solo shows including *Prickings* (2006) at Fabrica, Brighton that toured to Nottingham Castle and Museum (2007), and *Over the Teacups* (2008) Galerie M+R Fricke, Berlin, Germany. Her work has also been shown in major national and international group shows including *Out of the Ordinary: Spectacular Craft* (2007) at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, *Walls are Talking* (2010) at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, and *Personal Tempest* (2011) at Neue Gallerie, Innsbruck, Austria. Bertola's work involves installations, objects and drawings that respond to particular sites, collections and historical contexts. Her artworks are concerned with uncovering forgotten histories of people and places to make us reconsider the past.

As a contemporary art practitioner, Bertola uses lace fabric metaphors to articulate ideas in her work. Lace has been used as a reoccurring theme since her installation *Home from Home* (2002). Other works have included *Pricking's* (2006–07) (Figure 29), consisting of seven pieces of artworks that were ghosts of garments made from hundreds of pricked holes that form lace like patterns. The holes represent the point

in the hand production of lace where the pattern is pricked out onto paper to determine the form of the pattern. The work challenges and subverts the forgotten status and history of lace as both a feminine object and a form of invisible labour. The work becomes a metaphor for the women that wear lace and the women that made the lace. From this work came *Anatomy* (2006), consisting of a series of art pieces that were representations of her underwear in the form of pricking patterns. The pieces alluded to the heritage of the fabric and mass manufacturing.

Traditional lace design work is also alluded to in *Blue stockings* (2010) (Figure 27 & Figure 28), a series of twelve life-size drawings of lace tights that continued on from *Anatomy* (2006). Each drawing is named after one of the original members of the Bluestocking Society, a group of pioneering Georgian women who through networks of friendship and professional patronage promoted education for women.

When interviewed about her connection with lace, it was clear that metaphor played a strong role in communicating themes in Bertola's work. When questioned about lace it was evident that she did not feel that lace, as a fabric, was different in any way or worthy of any particular attention:

I don't think lace is any more popular or different than other handmade crafts, it's perhaps more noticeable because we are connected to it through our art or research

However, when analysing the text from the interviews, it is clear that Bertola made references that appeared to offer a different view. The status and value of lace is referred to as "worn like jewellery in the seventeenth century" and when describing her interest in lace, she talks of "the multiple associations that lie beneath the surface". Bertola has repeatedly used lace characteristics above other associated crafts as a metaphor to convey themes relating to gender. When asked again, Bertola said that she feels that lace has "unique" qualities in relation to other fabrics when thinking about the exclusive role women played in making handmade lace. What particularly interests her is the anonymity of these highly-skilled women who received no credit for the lace they produced. These hidden lives connect with Bertola's desire to portray forgotten and invisible histories that she reframes the making of new connections with the past:

I suppose when I looked and learned more about lace, discovering it was always made by women, that became really interesting. Lace became something that was a form of employment for many women and they were all anonymous and it was highly skilled work and they were never credited with the kind of piece of lace they made. It was all

anonymous and it was an industry that was controlled by men and I suppose I was quite interested in that, those two aspects of the fabric history and meaning.

Gender and anonymity plays a central role in the work of Bertola. She is interested in the forgotten stories of women the parts of history that were never written and that were dominated by male counterparts. When talking about this issue, she draws my attention to her artwork *Blue Stockings* (2010) that refers to a group of society women who were influential and notorious in the eighteenth century. These women were unknown to her until four years ago; she heard about them on a radio program. This taste of a hidden history is the stimulus for Bertola to express and make public through her artworks these forgotten stories:

So it's that kind of idea that there are women that have done those things but they are not talked about or are in those kind of books in the canons of history so it's sort of looking at history from a different perspective.

When questioned how lace suggests the theme of gender to her, she replied:

I am interested in it because most of my work is interested in the female role within the domestic environment so that's initially why I was interested in it and then I suppose when I looked to learn more about lace discovering it was always made by women it then became really interesting.

When pushing further on the idea of female labour and domesticity in her work, I was keen to hear how lace had or could play a part in expressing those areas that interested her:

I think because in contemporary terms it's so associated with the female body with femininity and with female sexuality if you think of lace stockings and lace knickers and also the domestic the net curtains and lace doilies it's all associated with visions you have that are very female and very domestic.

Lace offers Bertola a reference point and vehicle to provide the recurring sentiments she wants to communicate in her work, which she does with success and poignancy. Her drive to tell the forgotten histories and stories of women are compelling and intriguing, the reappearing theme of lace in her work intimates that she is able to use suggestions of this fabric to transmit themes that are important to her. When asked to describe lace in singular words her reply was "beautiful, intricate, feminine, exquisite, fragile, delicate".



Figure 27: Catherine Bertola, *Bluestockings-Elizabeth Montagu* (detail), 2008, pen and paper, 85 x 135 cm, photo Colin Davison.

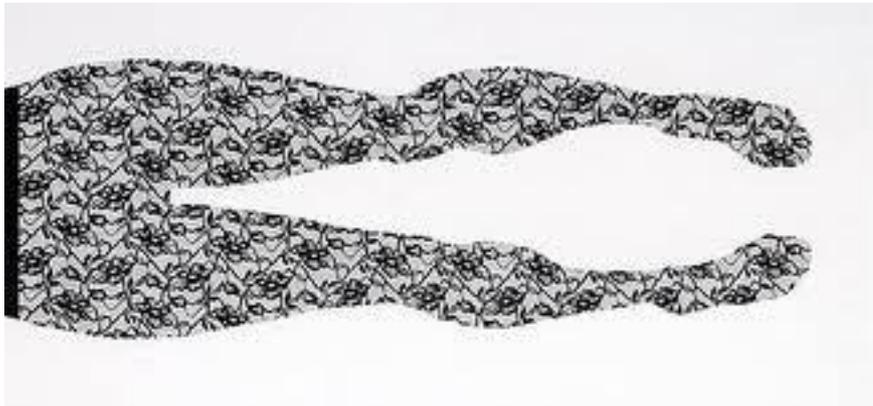


Figure 28: Catherine Bertola, *Bluestockings-Elizabeth Montagu*, 2008, pen and paper, 85 x 135 cm, photo Colin Davison.

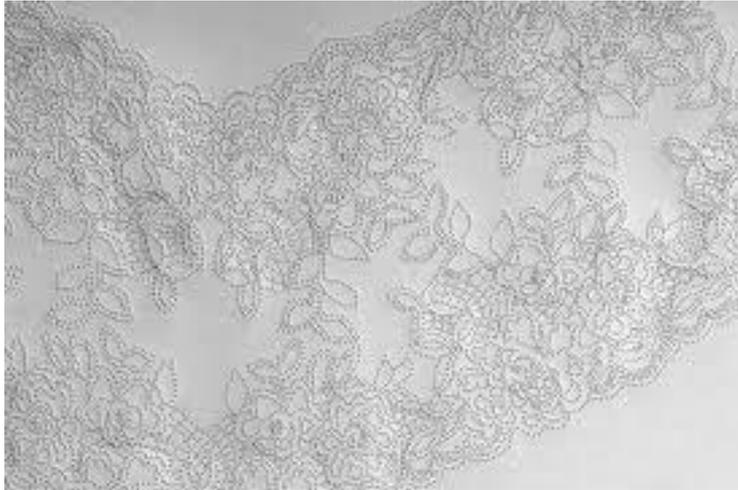


Figure 29: Catherine Bertola, *Anatomy 8*, 2006, paper, pin prick drawing of contemporary mass production lace underwear, 84 x 59.4 cm, photo Douglas Atfield



Figure 30: Catherine Bertola, *If She is Not*, 2010, pins and pillow case.

Elaine Bell

Interview 28/06/2011 10.30am (30min) NTU lace archive

Elaine Bell is a freelance fashion knitwear designer who graduated from Nottingham Trent University with a BA (Hons) in 2011 and also received the Wayne Hemingway *Land of the Lost Content* award in 2011. She works as a freelance knitwear designer for Cast Creations, who are based in the Lace Market area of Nottingham. Cast Creations act as her agent, selling her designs worldwide. Bell also has a vintage fabric and textiles company.

Bell was sponsored by Rowan Yarns to produce her collection *Hidden Histories of Lace* (2011) (Figure 31), which was inspired by artefacts in the Nottingham Trent University lace archive. Through the exploration of lace sample books and a 1930s

fashion correspondence book, Bell reframed lace patterns and silhouettes of lace clothing to produce a series of five garments for her end of year show at NTU. Bell's designs embodied structures of lace into machine knitted garments, replicating forms associated with constructions of lace. Bell strived to reproduce the raised texture playing with scale and yarns to create a series of garments to be worn on the catwalk.

What becomes clear when talking to Bell is her passion for vintage textiles and the relationship and understanding she has of lace. The archive offered her a vast quantity of historical lace artefacts that would ordinarily not be accessible to view. This opened up endless design possibilities for her with a view to directly translating the motifs and structures she found. The samples were photographed in detail and printed out. Each design was directly copied and plotted onto graph paper, and then translated into designs for the knitwear machine. The form and silhouettes of the garments mimicked images she had found of lace dresses from the 1930's, which she combined with contemporary shapes.

The remit for the collection was 'Summer Beach Wear'. It is interesting that Bell had chosen the combination of knitwear design and lace to create a collection to be worn in the summer. It is clear that Bell was motivated by the current popularity of lace and referred on a number of occasions to the fashion market: "I think it's very much in vogue for fashion" and "lace is really coming in for 2012". The commercial element was an obvious concern and paramount when future design samples were to be sold by an agent worldwide. The finished collection played with the raised quality of lace and scale of structures to create an open weave that revealed the skin beneath:

I think the designs of the lace not only the repetitive designs but kind of the structure I thought would work very well with ladders and cable stitching which I did in the final collection. It was great to photograph the samples and follow the contours really.

When questioned why lace bikinis had been used underneath the garments it was clear that Bell had wanted to retain the theme of lace but added "I wasn't bothered about seeing the skin" and "I didn't really give the styling a lot of thought". The choosing of bikinis for underneath the garments for the cat walk show appeared initially to be incidental:

The reason I styled them, I wanted to be quiet versatile I thought they were garments that could be worn with jeans because they were cotton they were designed for summer so I thought bikini's I actually got lace bikinis from Primark that were ridiculously cheap but look really good.

Although this was a subconscious act, it did not go unnoticed by the male viewers in the audience at the catwalk show, Bell states that “a lot of the men liked the styling” and “I got a lot of comments off the men”. When pushed on the use of bikinis in the collection, it was clear that the act of revealing the models bodies so openly increased her chances of the collection being spotted, since she states that “I like people to sit up and notice”.

The intricate open-work structure of lace was used by Bell to design innovative knitwear designs but also to grab the attention of the audience. The use of historical lace as inspiration enabled Bell to directly translate lace pattern and structure to her designs, combining it with technology to reinterpret the structure making it desirable and current in the contemporary fashion climate. The borrowing of lace associations contributed to the finished display and added an interest that singled out her design and connected knitwear with sexuality, but the overriding theme was the saleability for the fashion market. When I asked Bell about how she felt lace was perceived now in a contemporary culture she replied,

People don't appreciate it as much as they should do particularly hand-made lace, I don't know, I think it's very much in vogue for fashion. I think it has become a fashion commodity now when you look round Top Shop there is a lot of things with lace.

Although lace had been used by Bell as a starting point, it was clear that this was purely a stimulus for new work and was not through a desire to express any underlying themes. The commercial fashion industry has such a fast turnover of ideas, with some companies having multiple collections per season, that it is very difficult to engage with any deeper meaning other than saleability.



Figure 31: Elaine Bell, *Hidden Histories of Lace*, 2011, knitwear collection, Nottingham Trent University.

Visual mapping

In order to gain an understanding of the use of lace by the case study artists, a method of *cross case synthesis* is used as an analytical technique alongside description to underpin the strategy and provide links in data collected. Yin describes the process of cross case analysis as relevant where a number of case studies have been used to identify a phenomenon (Yin, 2009: 156). Text tables are also used to display data from the individual case studies, which enables a transparency of connections and similarities, drawing out emerging patterns to be analysed. Yin suggests that these patterns can be open to “argumentative interpretations” through the text, allowing for a holistic approach.

The implementation of cross case synthesis is carried out through a process that has been labelled for the purpose of this study as ‘visual mapping’. Two artists are selected from the case studies to provide between twenty and forty images that they thought contextualised their practice. The images could include the work of other artists, people, places, books or anything that they felt contributed to influencing their work. The two artists chosen are Danica Maier and Catherine Bertola. They are chosen because for me they offer connection to my own work, because I find their

practices inspirational and because I want the opportunity to look at their practice on a deeper level.

The use of images to analyse the practice of others is an appropriate approach in the context of an empirical practice-based enquiry. It allows Maier and Bertola to interpret their practice through a process compatible to their chosen means of communication. This allows for the inner thoughts of the artists to be exposed and analysed. John Berger believes that our visual understanding reflects our thoughts: “the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe” (Berger, 1972: 8). I also select images to be mapped that contextualise my practice, enabling a reflexive and subjective position to the study in parallel with my objective position, which as a researcher I hope will further enlighten the study.

The images from each artist are grouped into themed areas (Figure 32) example Catherine Bertola). Each group is then named according to the theme and connections between interlinking groups were established. This creates a visual map that distinguishes the dominating themes that appear to influence the practices of the artists. The following pages give examples of how the images are grouped and connected (Figure 32, Figure 33 & Figure 34). These images represent my interpretation of the images and the maps that were subsequently created to be analysed.

It is important that the formation of my maps is not corrupted by the knowledge gained through contact I had already made with the artists. To avoid these possible influences I set up and introduced two focus groups that could also use the images to create visual maps. The intention was for the groups to mimic the actions I had already taken in establishing themes that reflected their practice. This process added a new dimension of triangulation to the study that enables multiple sources of evidence to converge and produce a more credible analysis of the case studies.

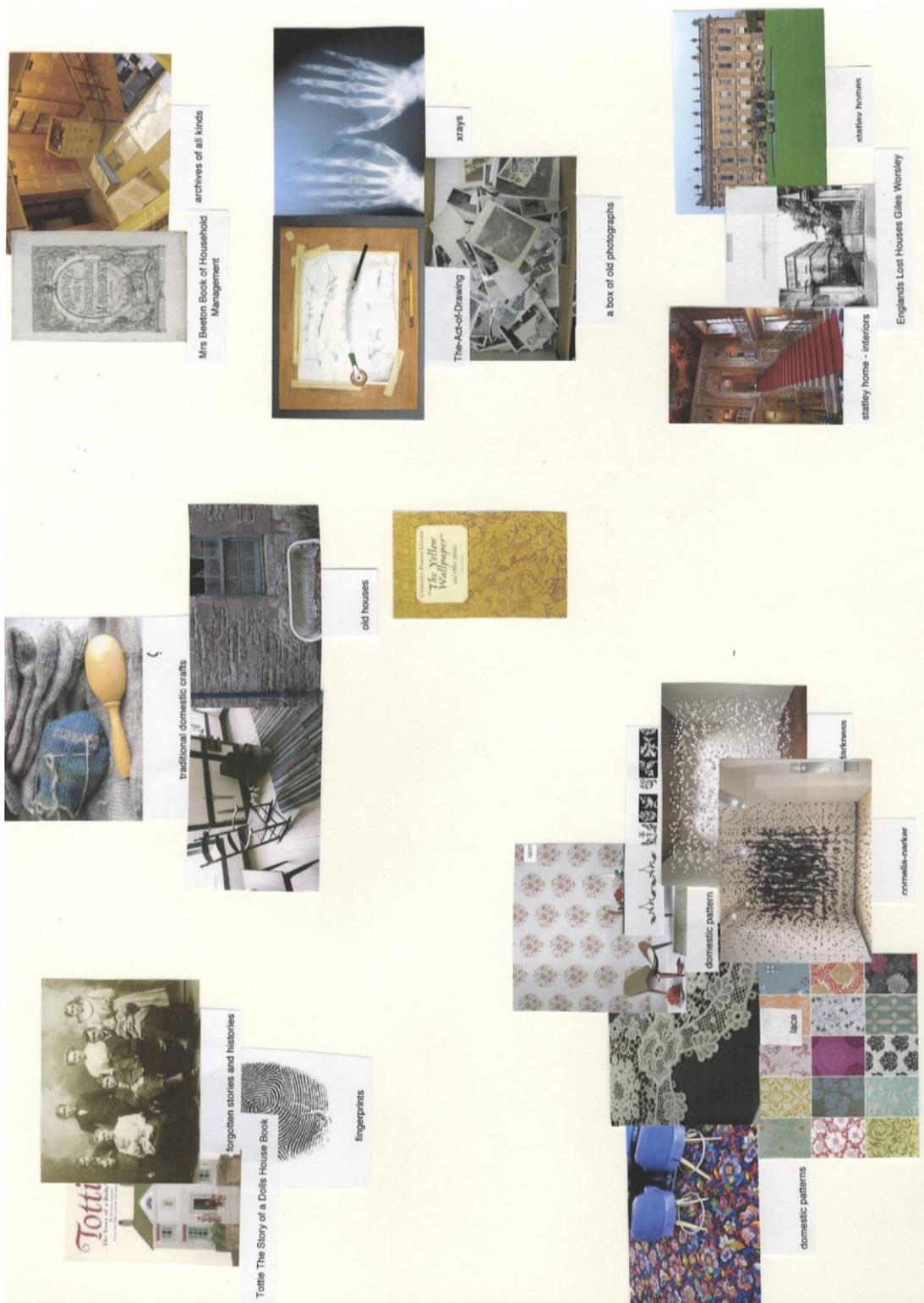


Figure 32: Catherine Bertola – context images collated in groups.

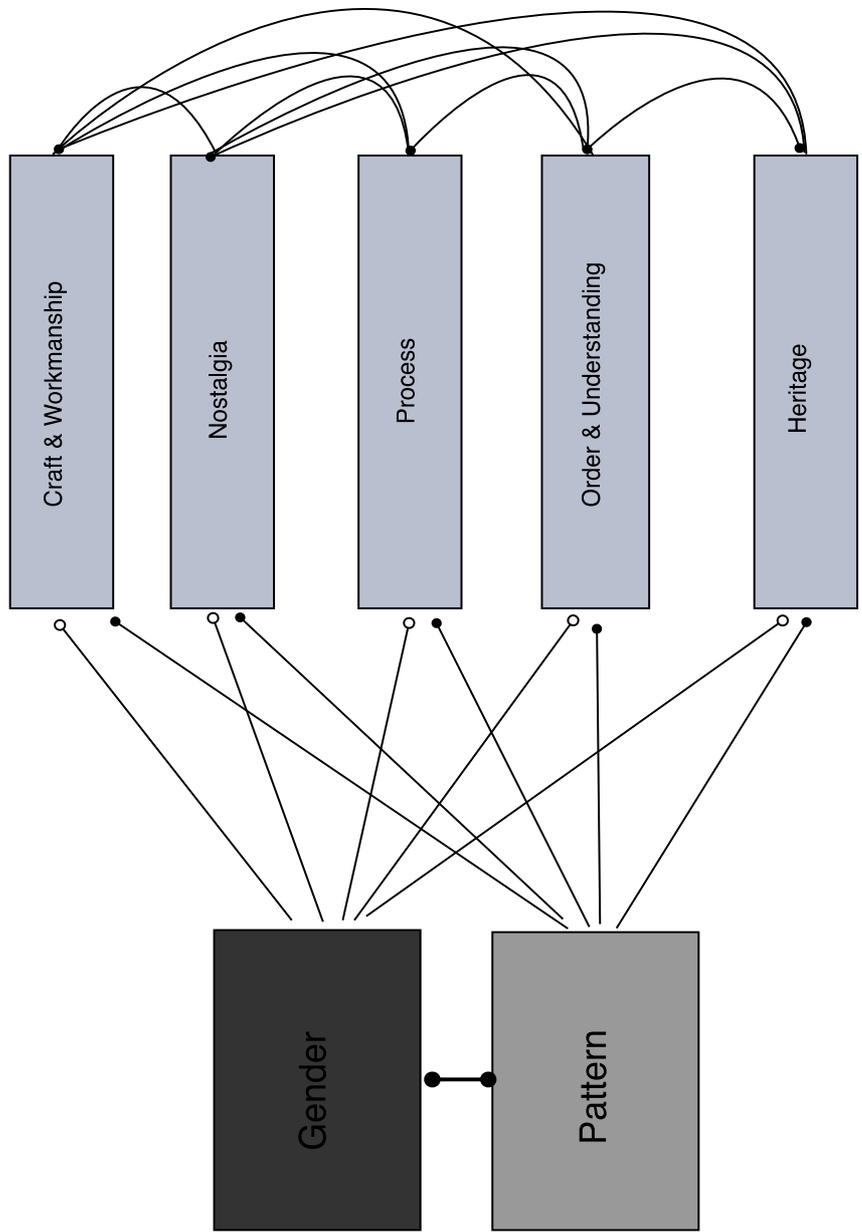


Figure 34: Catherine Bertola, Visual Map (Joy Buttriss).

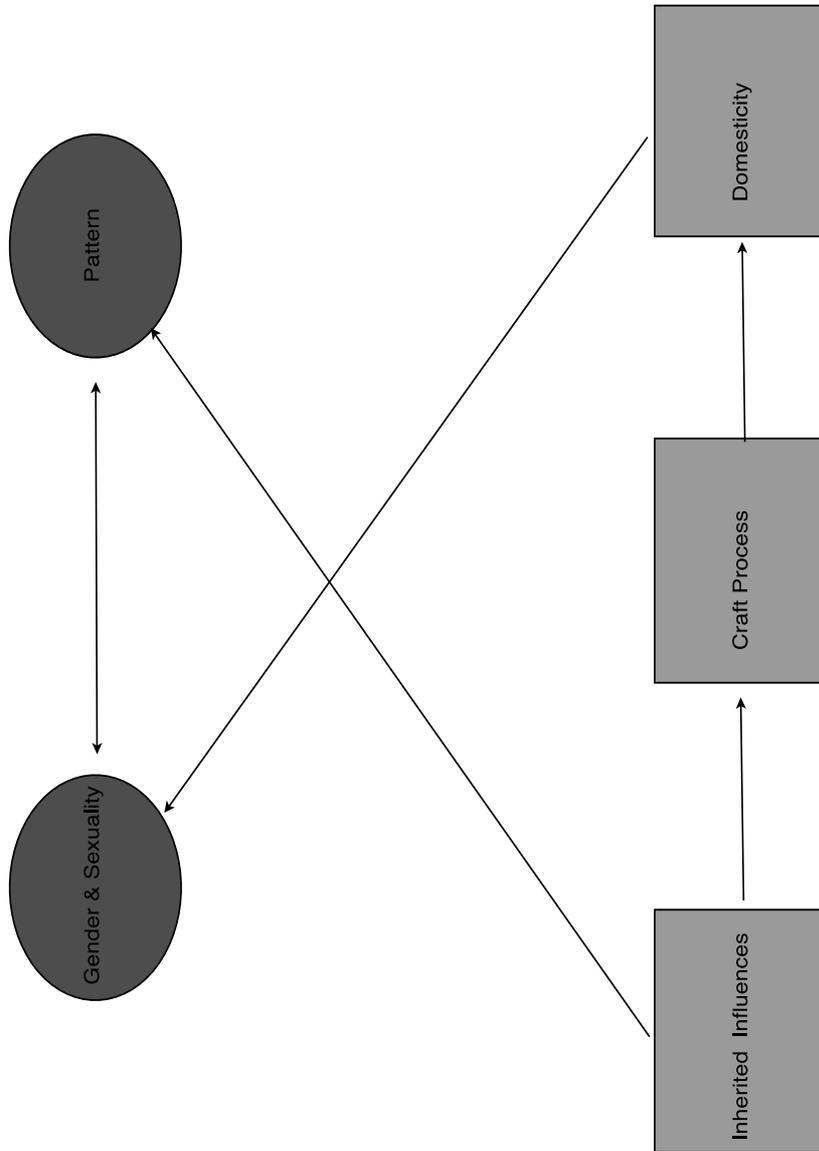


Figure 35: Danica Maier, Visual Map (Joy Buttress).

Triangulation

The method of case studies can be criticised for lacking rigour and allowing biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusion (Yin 2009: 14).

Triangulation is used as an appropriate approach to achieve analysis that takes into consideration the views of others. This is achieved through the use of focus groups that provide multiple sources of evidence, gaining a stronger and more accurate body of evidence (Gibbs 2007, Yin 2009).

Two focus groups were set up: participants with visual and analytical skills were chosen as the most appropriate and effective participants. Art and design students were identified as a suitable group that was easily accessible and available through NTU. The students chosen for group 1 were Brenda Baxter (MA Fine Art), Randy Huseby (MA Textiles) and Lucy Davison (MA Textiles); group 2 comprised Belen Cerezo (PhD Fine Art) and Rebecca Gamble (PhD Fine Art) for a variety of creative approaches and perspectives.

The students were asked to create a visual mind map from the images provided by the artists. All artists' work was kept anonymous to prevent already-established opinions of the artists interfering with the results. The groups were encouraged to form connections and links by gathering the images. The groups formed were then labelled and links were drawn to connecting groups of images. I silently observed each group and recorded the session through photographs, recordings and notes that were later analysed and compared.

It became obvious while observing group 1 that they were taking the chosen images at face value and exploring and commenting on the detail of the images rather than grouping through conceptual themes and ideas. Group 2's approach appeared analytical, thinking in terms of a broader understanding of possible themes that encompassed the whole practice of the artists.

When analysing the maps created by the groups, it is clear that similar themes were identified. The map I had created for Danica Maier suggested two dominating areas: 'gender' and 'sexuality'. From these areas came pattern, domesticity and craft (Figure 35).

Group 1 also distinguished two main areas: 'women and home' and 'pattern'. Feeding from them, but less significant, were 'woman as object', 'design and home' and 'stitch and feminism'. Group 2 separated three clear themes of 'craft and pattern', 'sexuality' and 'domesticity' that were all encompassed by issues of gender.

It became apparent that the focus groups had established the powerful interplay that domesticity plays in Maier's work. I had seen it as a lesser theme fed from her interest in gender related issues. Referring back to her interview, what also became clear was the dominant role women had played in her life and the contribution they had made to her understanding of craft techniques. These relationships were also loaded with expectation when in the home and influenced the pull Maier had felt between 'homemaker' and 'independent woman'. These feelings were reflected in the images she had chosen depicting 1950s film stars, interiors and baking magazines covers.

In her interview, Maier compares the questioning of women's issues to the work of artist Karla Black, with her use of objects and materials to query the feminine and issues relating to women. Maier felt that objects that were charged with women's issues that surrounded her upbringing. She states, "when I was raised these are what I was surrounded by and therefore these are things that I am interested in' which then form a 'strong starting point in my work".

When analysing and comparing these findings it is clear that the visual maps provide a clear in-depth understanding of the concepts that form Maier's work. The addition of the focus groups introduces an extra questioning and allows the study to establish further the potential reasons why lace has been used in her work.

When I mapped the visual images of Catherine Bertola, it was clear that the two main themes running through her work were 'gender' and 'pattern', feeding in equal measures to areas of 'craft and process', 'heritage' and 'history' (Figure 34).

Group 1 mapped out Maier's practice in the very simplified terms of 'pattern' as the dominating theme, with 'craft' and 'interiors' feeding off this main area. When comparing this to group 2, 'pattern' played a far less significant role when defining key areas. A multifaceted map was created that represented 'gender', 'class', 'process' and 'domesticity'. 'Objects and archives' also played a part, which I had overlooked when mapping her images. My focus was on the themes of the finished pieces of work rather than the process by which she created them and as such I took the sources for granted.

When looking back over the interviews, Bertola had made it clear that archives have played a significant role in her work. She describes them as a place where her research giving her what she describes as "the understanding in terms of the context". This insight reflects a key area that drove Bertola's work forward, linking themes of 'history' and 'heritage'. This then suggests the strategic role that lace can

play in contemporary art as a bridge between both aspects of heritage and gender, providing a reference to the past and women's issues.

The process of visual mapping allows me to gain a different dialogue with the artist who instigated unstructured answers that were insightful and beneficial to the inquiry. This approach avoids prepared and contrived answers or statements from the artist that had already been used for websites, articles or even interviews. It also allows the two artists involved to analyse their practice through a natural mode that precipitated deeper thought when analysing and describing their practice. The focus groups introduce the thoughts of others to the research, prompting new analysis and thought on areas that may have been overlooked or not closely analysed.

In terms of visually mapping my own practice, it is a useful reflective process that allows me to understand how others viewed the themes present in my work. It is however difficult to use the maps created as a contribution my analysis. Lace had not been present in my work before this time and I had not chosen it to convey themes that were already established in my practice. I therefore reflect on the undertaking as a valuable process to define my practice and as an indicator of change through newly formed concepts.

Conclusion

The contemporary use of lace in art and design is complex. The case studies offer a method that helps get to the centre of the issue through direct contact with current creative practice. It is important that the approach is qualitative, distinguishing key practitioners recognised in their fields while making strong connections with themes of lace. Interviewing the artists and designers creates a transcribed text that can be studied and analysed. Visual mapping contributes to the collected data and enables previous notional formations to be questioned and conclusions to be substantiated.

It becomes clear from the data collected that each practitioner encompasses multiple underlying concepts in their work which includes areas of craft, heritage, sexuality and gender. All these areas are open to exploration through the application of lace themes in their work.

Shane Waltener uses the craft process of making to create lace webs that invade spaces and join together the skills of people to create new narratives that reflect a changing society. The structure of historical lace is used by Elaine Bell to recreate contemporary fashion garments that embody shapes and forms of lace in manifestations not associated with traditional techniques. Textile artist Cecilia Heffer recreates contemporary lace from the foundation of historical archives and also

reinforces the theme of lace through craft and heritage. Ideas behind gender and sexuality are confronted in the work of Danica Maier and Catherine Berola, playing with metaphors of lace. They question our connections with lace, producing work that is rich with craft process and decoration that challenge our perceptions and expectations of pattern and fabric.

The method of case study research also enables me to access and expose the layers of the artist, allowing an insight into the foundations of their practice, which provides a comprehension that would have been otherwise hard to achieve. I found the contact with Danica Maier and Catherine Bertola particularly helpful; I had already felt an affinity with their work before I chose them as the subjects of my case studies. Through this process I have been able to observe the strength of their artwork through close investigative practices that included interviews and visual mapping. The visual mapping provides a particular awareness of their ideas; it takes away the ambiguity of discourse and replaces it with images that clearly exposed their interests, thoughts and concepts by opening a new dialogue and discussion about the artworks they produce.

The access I achieved through case studies had an impact on my practice, empowering me to challenge my way of working and encouraging me to be even more self-reflective, leading me to identify the strong themes in my work of skin, beauty, sexuality and pattern. The in-depth study extended my thinking to new ways of concept development and encouraged me to be bold in my evolution of theoretical ideas. The following chapter brings together those ideas, drawing from the knowledge gained to inform my own practice while working on the themes of skin and pattern. Skin is explored addressing ideas around beauty and sexuality. Pattern is considered and contextualised in the framework of the Nottingham Trent University lace archive, where the connections are explored between lace and gender. The chapter also highlights artists that have used themes of skin in their practice to express the metaphorical value of our outer surface to transmit ideas identity and gender.

Chapter Four: Skin as a site and sight for exploration and decoration

Introduction

This chapter aims to address skin in the context of my own practice and also in contemporary art practice. My starting point is the exploration of skin as a canvas and metaphor. I consider the application of both permanent and temporary pattern and the naturally occurring marks and textures that grow, die and rejuvenate throughout the life of a living skin. Skin can generate a cultural form of communication that is both sexual and political, forming an interface that engages with the visceral and physical body through the application of manmade patterns that adorn and scar the surface of the skin. These themes and connections are used in the development of my ideas and are explored in my practice-based work through vintage leather opera gloves, latex and the patterns I have found in the NTU lace archive.

This interplay of pattern and skin is explored through the development of artworks, combining my study of lace and my own theoretical development. It addresses the essential role pattern plays in the construction of lace designs that includes both geometric and non-geometric shapes often with a traditional emphasis on flora and fauna. The chapter looks at the importance of pattern when placed on the bare skin, discussing tattoos, scarification and the afflictions caused by disease or genetic marking on the body and how these differing ideas of pattern have been translated through art.

The second half of this chapter highlights artists that have used the concept of skin and pattern to convey a variety of themes in their practice challenging us on a number of levels. The highlighted practitioners explore ideas associated with our bodily surface, offering a variety of approaches that deal with the physicality of skin and the abstract concept of skin. Artists are discussed that use themes of skin and the body through a number of mediums to redefine and challenge cultural constraints of body image and perceptions of beauty.

Skin and pattern: as a theme in my practice

Skin is a multilayered, multipurpose membrane that protects, covers and contains the organs. It is sensitive to heat and touch and is our soft outer covering that shapes and forms the physical reality of the body. It encases the inner working of our bodies

and is the immediate and obvious indicator of our race and age. Skin offers me a powerful physical and metaphorical canvas to explore ideas around sexuality and beauty. It connects my ideas on the body and lace pattern and the theories I am developing around the objectification of the female form.

I return to the research I have done on adornment (see [Chapter Two: 60](#)) to understand the implications of pattern in a cultural context and the symbolic meaning for cultures throughout the world and through history. Beauty can be culturally defined and commoditised through the application of marks on the body. Pattern created through disease and birth can also have an inhibiting and emotional effect on a human being in society, creating isolation and rejection through visual pattern that is not desired. People have used pattern on skin both permanent and temporary as a powerful platform to challenge the social constraints of appearance. This interplay of pattern and skin offers me an opportunity to explore my own ideas around lace, through surfaces that replicate human skin by adding interventions that adorn, disrupt and embellish the surface. Leather is chosen for my artworks as this offers the closest likeness to human skin and encompasses ideas around sexuality.

In 2010 I started collecting white leather opera gloves from vintage shops and EBay. The use of an object already worn and shaped to the hand of another woman provides a 'second skin' and an appropriate starting point to create work that has the potential to exploit and define aspects of femininity. Gloves have much in common with lace; both are historical symbols of wealth, often worn to determine the wearers' status and position in society. Philippe Perrot observed that gloves "illustrate the dialectic of conformism and distinction inherent in clothing behaviour in mobile societies" (Perrot, 1994: 120). Etiquette handbooks in nineteenth century society were commonplace; they were written with an authoritarian approach and a threatening manner, and determined the approach to dress taken by both men and women in the wearing of gloves. Gloves played a part in the conformity that was vital for acceptance as a lady in society; women were expected to always wear their gloves in church or in a theatre. The glove helped mediate through the difficulties of navigating suggestive touch creating a distance that was required by modesty. Skin to skin contact through touch in public was considered distasteful, except in private circumstances, so the glove became the intermediate barrier which enabled contact to happen Valerie Cummings describes gloves as the 'interposition needed to be acceptable' (Cumming 1982: 57). The insertion of fabric covering the organs of touch and apprehension emphasised the sexual insinuations on a "highly eroticised area of the body", that is, the hand (Perrot 1994: 106). The haptic qualities of leather gloves

offer the viewer an added sensory perception and manipulation combining the nuances of physical restriction and the enticing gestures of the hand. Interconnecting themes are found in gloves and lace fabric, each embracing links with a historical past that connected wealth and social standing and more recent associations of sexuality and erotica.

The use of pre-worn gloves was also important to me when explore my ideas of the body, it added a tension between the leather form and the embodiment of the past owner. This included the creases and the indentation of the hand contributing to the balance between form and function. Pre-worn gloves offered another dimension and significance to the artwork, Doris Salcedo determines the use of worn apparel as “charged with significance, with a meaning they have acquired in the practice of the everyday” (Salcedo, 2000: 21). The worn gloves introduced the idea of decay and loss of form and offered my concept a highly charged canvas with opposing themes of modesty, power and eroticism, and even the length of the glove was significant. Valerie Steele suggests that “gloves that extend up to the elbow or even the armpits (such as opera gloves) tend to be much sexier” (Steele, 1996: 133). The investigation of these links through creative processes plays an important part in consolidating the developing themes and concepts.

The ambiguity of forbidden touch became significant within my artwork; I was interested in generating a balance between object and viewer and creating an emotive boundary. I began to explore the relationship between objects and materials and how they can imbue a visceral and haptic response, disabling and/or repelling the viewer. I had been greatly moved when visiting the exhibition *Louise Bourgeois: The Fabric Works* (2010). Bourgeois’ sensibility of selection, placement of fabric and incredible use of detail created for me a relationship with the artworks that aroused intense inward feelings and a sense of voyeurism. Flesh-coloured forms resembled uncertain but intimate body shapes, the fabric was worn and used with suggestive stains and marks, fabric was cut, stitched and reworked to create artworks that played with colour, pattern and shape. This selection and treatment of fabric offered an approach that was disturbing, intriguing and forceful. It created a powerful interplay with the viewer, enticing a closer engagement and a physical urge to touch and experience the fabric.

This relationship and engagement was explored in the work of Surrealist Meret Oppenheim in a fur-lined cup and saucer, *Object* (1936). Oppenheim used skin to provoke and confront the viewer with an everyday object that offered sexual and sensuous references. Her art piece echoed the sentiments of Leopold Sacher-

Masoch's novel *Venus in Furs* (1870) disturbing and unsettling the viewers' conceptions. German artist Rosemarie Trockel also plays with our perception of objects to question issues including sexuality, feminism and the human body. Her work uses various forms and mediums but she has worked a great deal with wool since the mid-eighties, using knitting machines and computers. Her large-scale 'knitting pictures' are a response to a male dominated art world, which by using traditionally feminine resources and techniques she questions the hierarchy of materials. Her knitted pictures are stretched like a canvas and are integrated with politically charged symbols such as the hammer and sickle, Playboy bunny and swastikas. Her use of apparently inferior materials and process methods disarms the viewer by changing the rules and perception of the material.

This balance of object and material became an overriding theme in my own work and engaged it in an investigative process that explored the dichotomy between pattern (historical lace motifs) and the surface of skin (leather glove). My intention was to explore the boundaries created through pattern and the implications that arise from using the combination of both pattern and skin. Through the materials and processes I used, I considered the ideas that had formed from reading George Simmel and his essay *Adornment* (Simmel, in: Frisby and Featherstone, 2000). His essay had made me aware of the potential power of adornment to create a relationship with the viewer. Simmel argues that we adorn our bodies for ourselves but also for the purpose of others. He suggests that this is done not only for our own gratification but also for the pleasure and "visual delight" that it offers others, intensifying and enlarging the presence of the person through what he describes as a sort of emanating radiation (Simmel, in: Frisby and Featherstone, 2000: 207). The idea of skin and body and the placement of decoration are exploited through my own investigations that experiment with pattern and surface through the adornment of the white leather opera glove.

My ideas of pattern and the body were examined through the application of both digital and hand-led processes with each glove subjected to multiple approaches that included pricking, piercing, marking, cutting, burning and sewing. These experiments produced a visual display of unfamiliar surfaces that were intriguing and decorative and as often in our reaction to skin markings, with an element of repulsion examples of the multiple ways I worked with the leather gloves can be seen in the images below (Figure 36). I then considered other materials that replicated human skin and introduced latex rubber and liquid latex to my analysis and investigation. Liquid latex and latex rubber both have a strong association with sexuality and offered a new

surface that made links with erotica and fetishism. Latex as a material has a pliability and stretch that when used in clothing is seen as a second skin, which can both excite and repel the viewer.



Figure 36: Joy Buttress, glove samples, 2010 – 2011, vintage opera gloves, silk thread, iron powder, laser etching, steel wire, various sizes, artists studio Nottingham.

Skin and lace are so closely linked through pattern that my attention was drawn back to the Nottingham Trent University lace archive as a starting point to discover

historical lace motifs. I was fascinated with a section of the archive that housed a large number of design portfolios containing prints of hand-painted plates abundant with designs and used as inspiration for the Nottingham lace designers and manufacturers. Many of them had been obtained from the Great Exhibitions of Europe by lace manufacturers around the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century and bought back to Nottingham. The portfolio I found of particular interest was entitled *Ornamentale Zierformen Nach Der Natur* ('Ornamental Decorative Shapes From Nature'), designed in the Royal Art School, Plauen Germany, and a recipient of the highest award at the Great Exhibition in Brussels, (1910) (Figure 37). The portfolio contains twenty-four plates of designs inspired by natural forms found in flora and fauna, but unfortunately the author is unknown.

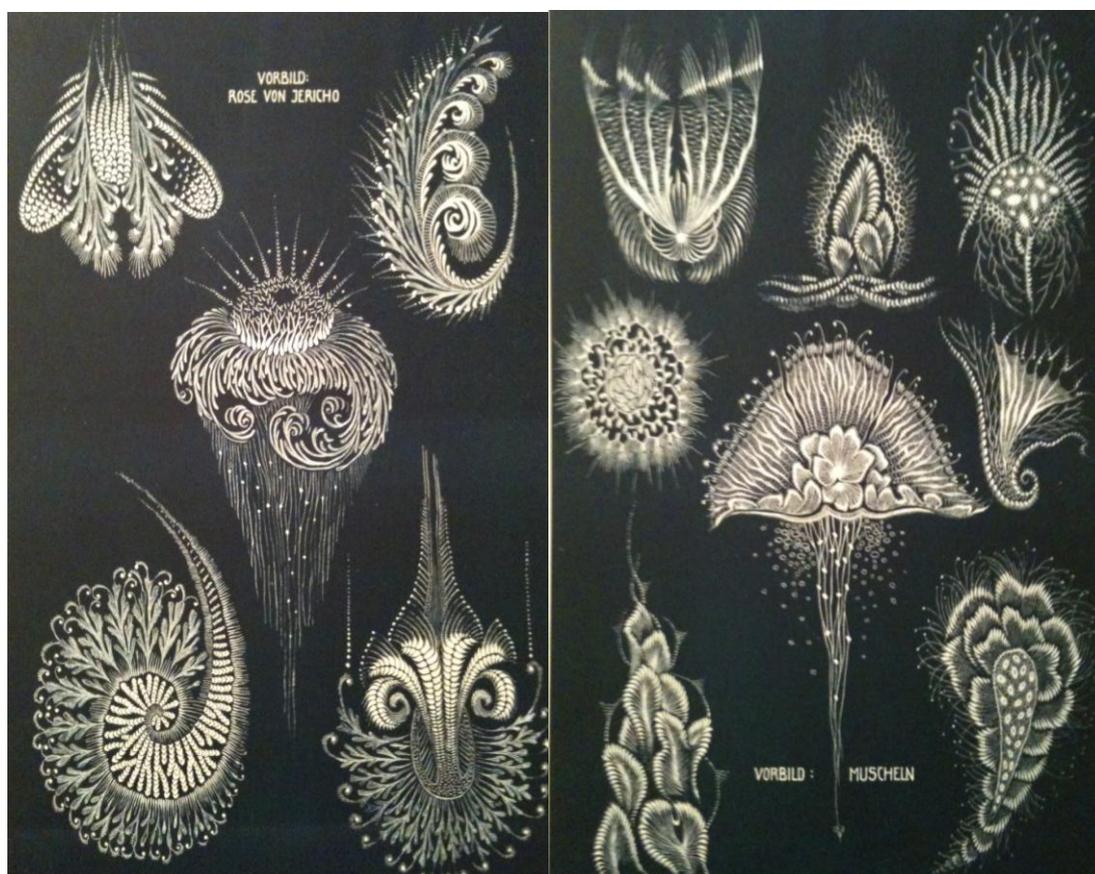


Figure 37: Author unknown (design portfolio), *Ornamental Decorative Shapes from Nature*, 1910, Nottingham Trent University Lace Archive, Nottingham.

During the middle of the nineteenth century, principles of naturalism were starting to emerge in the arts and became strongly established as a recognised influence. Art Nouveau was a widespread art movement from the period 1890–1910 (Madsen 2002: 187), distinguishable by the way it interpreted nature as a resource to discover a new beauty. The approach was taken to replicate nature in the arts and had two

general directions: The first was to imitate growing natural forms in an attempt to replicate the impression of nature (Grady, in: Madsen 2002: 188) and the second was to marry the onset of the industrial world and nature. It was important to the movement to create art and design that embraced both the natural world and the new technology of the time. The influence of the Art Nouveau could be seen all over Europe by the turn of the nineteenth century, the movement, or 'Jugendstil' as it was known in Germany, embraced all aspects of design in the home and in architecture.

The images I found in the portfolio appear to be influenced by the work of German biologist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919) who produced an influential book of lithographic prints entitled *Kunstformen der Nature* ('Art Forms of Nature') (1899), which was a landmark in the field of naturalist illustration. His stylised and decorative images embraced a new audience, engaging both scientists and artists.

The drawings of Haeckel were influential because they reflected the Art Nouveau style, but also created an extended range of imagery to be used as inspiration. His influences could be seen across a broad spectrum of design fields including the work of artist Constant Roux (1865–1928), who created a chandelier for the Musée Océanographique in Monaco (Figure 39). The design was a translation of Haeckel's *Discomedusae* (jellyfish) illustration. The chandelier and the museum was dedicated in 1910 by its founder Albert I, at which Haeckel was present (Shick, 2008). A contemporary interpretation of Haeckel's *Discomedusae* can also be seen in the contemporary work of artist Timothy Horn, using transparent rubber (Horn, 2011) and entitled *Discomedusae* (2004) (Figure 40) in memory of Haeckel's drawing.

An important platform for the promotion of Art Nouveau was the *Exposition Universelle* (1900), a world fair held in Paris that exhibited the style throughout the event. The influence of Haeckel was strikingly evident in the principal gateway designed by Rene Binet, creating an ornate and grand entrance based on Haeckel's drawings of radiolarian structures. The relationship between the science of Ernst Haeckel and architecture of Rene Binet has recently been recognised in an exhibition at the Northwestern University Library, Charles Deering McCormick library of Special Collections (USA), entitled *Rene Binet & Ernst Haeckel's Collaboration: Magical Naturalism & Architectural Ornament* (2011). Art Nouveau has had a lasting influence on art and design that has challenged our approach to the natural world.



Figure 38: Ernst Haeckels, 'Discomedusae', *Art Forms in Nature*, 1899, Germany.

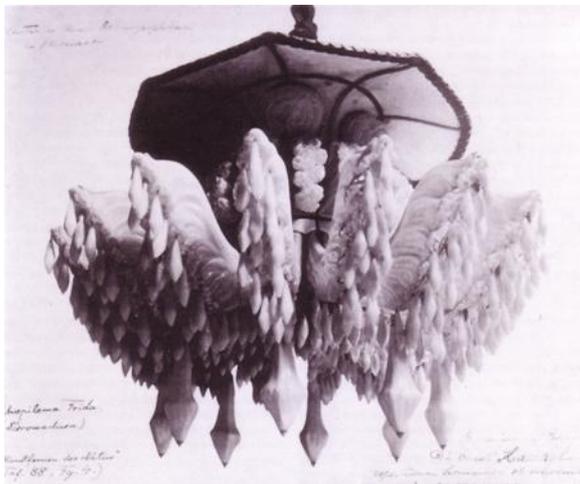


Figure 39: Constant Roux, *Chandelier*, 1910, glass and metal, Musee Oceanographique, Monaco.



Figure 40: Timothy Horn, *Discomedusae*, 2004, Transparent rubber, copper tubing, light fixtures, 7 ft diameter, Collection of Samtang Museum, Adelaide, Australia.

This influence is reflected in the NTU archive, capturing the change and transformation in lace design, which is clearly evident in the design portfolios held in the collection. An example of this is the work of designer Ludwig Otto Werder (1868–1902) whose portfolio *New Lace – Sketches for lace and Embroideries* (1898), reflects the movement of transformation from the persistence of traditional pattern. Werder was born in the town of St Gall, Switzerland, a town known for its connections with design and industry and becoming an important centre for designs applied to machine embroidery. Machine embroidery was often used for the production of ‘chemical lace’, sometimes known as ‘Guipure’ lace, a process that applies embroidery to a material backing that disintegrates after the pattern has been created. From 1896, Werder was employed as a professor for the design of machine embroidery at the school of design. He had trained in Paris as a designer and saw his work exhibited at the World Exhibition in Paris (1889).

Otto Alder a respected manufacturer and member of the museums commission in St Gall was critical of Werder's design portfolio, *New Lace*. He opposed the new ornament and design and the ‘new style’ which, in his opinion, was “lacking elegance and grace” (Wanner-Jean Richard, 1993). Werder was a strong follower and representative of floral Art Nouveau and changed these styles to work in the context of machine embroidery. The *New Lace* portfolio is part of the NTU collection and contains an introduction written by Werder, indicating his concerns about not changing with the current art movement. He believes that it is his ‘duty’ as a teacher of textile design to take an ‘active interest in the attempts for progress, he ends his statement by urging his colleagues and industry to devote time in this ‘new direction’ (Werder, 1898).

Great exhibitions and festivals have consistently played an important part in disseminating new design initiatives. The Festival Pattern group was established as part of the Festival of Britain (1951). It involved X-ray crystallographers, designers and manufacturers and was instigated by Dr Helen Megaw, a leading Cambridge scientist. Diagrams of atomic structures were used to once again unite science and art to inspire patterns and new work. The Festival Pattern Group produced curtains, wallpapers, carpets, lace, dress fabric, ties, plates and ashtrays that incorporated design found in the images of atoms. Nottingham lace manufacturers A.C. Gill were responsible for manufacturing the lace designed by H. Webster, creating a selection of designs (Figure 41). A dress made from the designs was worn by Lady Alice Bragg for the Congress of the International Union of Crystallographers in Stockholm, 1951 (Welcome Trust, 2010). The successful designs showed that science and art

could have a mutually beneficial relationship that can demonstrate the decorative applications of science.

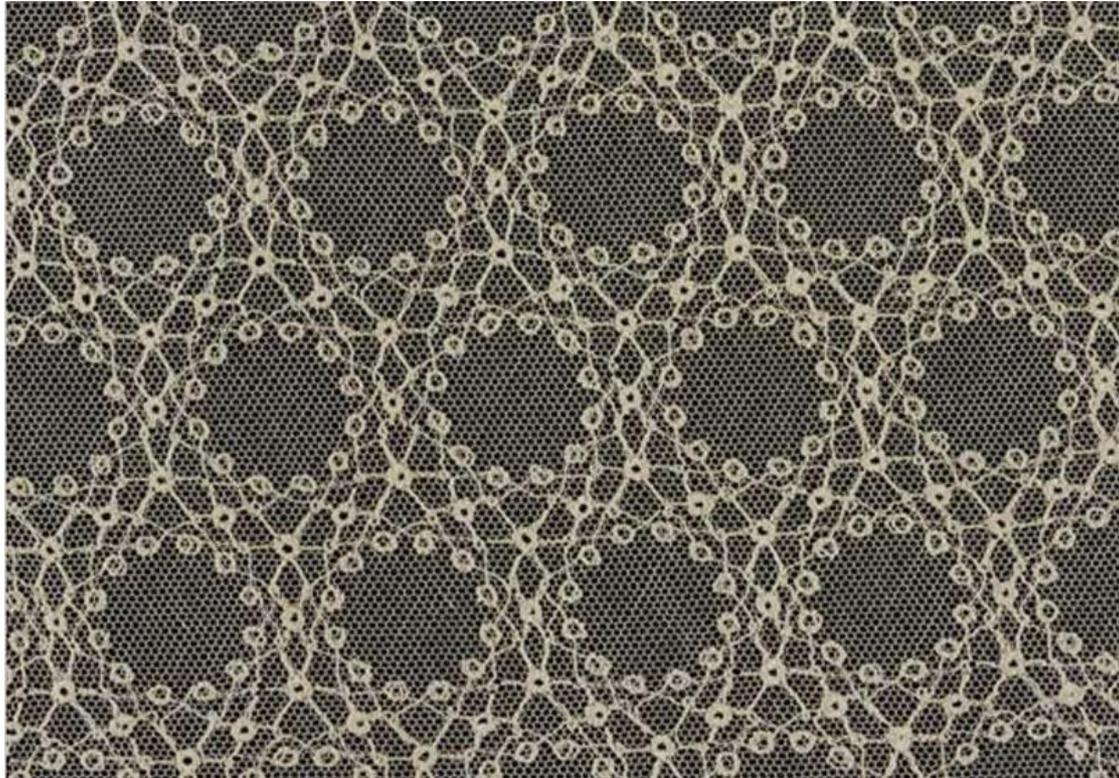


Figure 41: Beryl 8.9 lace, Crystallographer: Lawrence Biggs; designed by H Webster for AC Gill, 1951, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

This understanding of the potential of pattern allowed me to explore aspects of lace and design history that contributed to a deeper grasp of the study. I moved on to exploit the patterns I had discovered in the portfolio and used them as a starting point to think about ideas relating to lace motifs and skin. The portfolio contained 24 plates (Figure 37) that had multiple designs that replicated botanical drawings of flora and fauna. The designs had an otherworldly quality to them and provided intricate and intriguing patterns and forms. I was excited that this portfolio had once been inspiration for other artists with a similar intention to transform the motifs into another art form.

Initially I took photographs and made drawings of the designs in my sketchbook. I wanted to attempt to translate them accurately so they still reflected their original form (Figure 42). The drawings were scanned, manipulated and digitally transformed to allow formatting using the *Adobe Illustrator* software. This process enabled the images to conform to the specification for the laser cutter and the digital embroidery machine (Figure 43). The patterns were then used in a variety of ways including

etching, cutting and stitching in order to translate the patterns on leather fabric and latex rubber both of which for the purpose of my work substituted human skin.

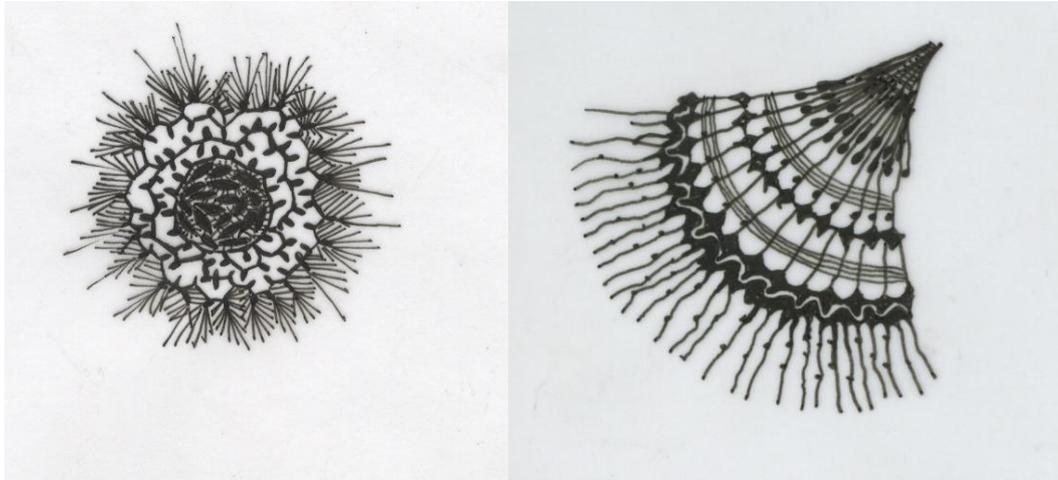


Figure 42: Joy Buttriss, sketches from *Ornamental Shapes from Nature*, 2010, pen and paper, Nottingham.



Figure 43: Joy Buttriss, details of glove sample one and three, 2011, laser etching and cutting, hand embroidered, vintage leather opera gloves, thread, paint, Nottingham.

Skin and Pattern: in the practice of others

In contemporary art, the surface of the body is defined as a projection surface and a fetish, a place of wounds and stigmatization, an individual dress or a cover to be modified. (*Benthien 2002: 3*)

Skin has been a preoccupation of artists, especially women artists, over the past quarter century (Flanagan & Booth, 2007). Artists, designers and exhibitions have used skin and pattern as a theme to communicate multiple ideas. A variety of artists engages with skin as a surface or metaphor. The physicality of skin offers the artist a wealth of associations and opportunities to experiment with the skin as a canvas. The fascination of the surface of the body for artist and scientist alike has created an amazing array of ideas and concepts that challenge and address the potential of skin to convey inner feelings and thoughts. The application of pattern to decorate and veil the surface of the body appears to add a further mystery that adds intrigue and tension and provides a metaphorical surface to explore.

Artist Nicola Constantino uses a subtle seduction to challenge us, creating a contradictory reaction of attraction and repulsion, displaying her clothing and accessories as haute couture. On closer inspection, the items are sexually charged and appear to be constructed from skin, with multiple protruding human nipples and anuses that add confusion to the definition. Through art piece *Human Finery* (2000), comment is made on the meat and leather industries and references the Surrealist tradition of ambiguous provocation. Constantino challenges the viewer on a number of levels that deal with body politics, gender issues and wider political engagement on consumerism.

Skin as the indicator of our identity is a recurring theme in the work of many contemporary artists. The act of replicating it or changing our perceptions of it can subvert the initial use and question our understanding. The use of skin in art adds a powerful personal response along with the visual, aesthetic response. Kira O'Reilly is an artist who uses her own skin as the site and medium of her work (see Chapter One: 36). The play of her own skin and body to engage with the audience is paramount in conveying strong personally political themes in her work. The audience is sometimes asked to write on or cut into her skin and body tissue (Figure 44). This act is done to invoke "notions of trauma (a wound) and stigma (a mark) towards a "spoiling" and opening of the body suggesting an alterity or otherness" (Dumas, in: Hauser, 2008: 30). Her outer skin becomes the shield that is opened and exposes her innermost feeling whilst the outer surface becomes a palimpsest of scars that

suggest the passing of time, creating “narrative threads of the personal, sexual, social and political knot and unknot in shifting permutations” (Dumas, in: Hauser, 2008: 30).



Figure 44: Kira O'Reilly, *Post Succour (legs) skin bearing incision marks (legs)*, 2001, image taken at the end of the Succour performance, Liverpool , photo Manuel Vason.

The dressing of our bodies through dress, jewellery, body paint and tattoos is suggested by Joanne Entwistle to be “vital to our acceptance in cultures around the world”. She also believes it adds a mystery to the body that that makes it “provocative” and “infused” with sexuality (Entwistle, 2000). The marking of bodies can distinguish us from each other adding our own expression of beauty and establishing our presence.

Tattoos, like lace, decorate the skin in pattern and shapes, which can draw attention to our skin adding a mystery that veils the body. Through the application of pattern and a covering of the skin an erotic allure of the striptease can be recreated. Tattoos obstruct the final revelation and complete unveiling of the body, poising the gaze at the brink of erotic anticipation. Michael Hardin suggests that the tattoo on the female body can then represent her ‘veiled sexuality’ (Hardin, 1999). This control empowers the woman to break free from being a passive object by denying the male gaze of sexual intervention and penetration (Hardin, 1999: 97). This empowerment to change our bodily surface is not a new phenomenon; the initial interest for women to tattoo their bodies came in the first wave of feminism in the late nineteenth century. The second craze came in the 1920s, which then led to women breaking the “gender barrier in the feminist 70s” (Mifflin, 1997: iv). Tattoos allowed women to change the

way they looked permanently and also enabled them to question the attitudes towards women.

An example of this is reflected in the work of performance artist VALIE EXPORT in her art piece *Body Sign Action* (1970) (Figure 45). The image of a suspender belt strap is tattooed on her thigh, EXPORT calls the tattoo a “symbol of a past enslavement”, and “repressed sexuality” (Export, 2011). This defiant act was done to challenge a male-dominated society that she felt set the position and expectation of women.

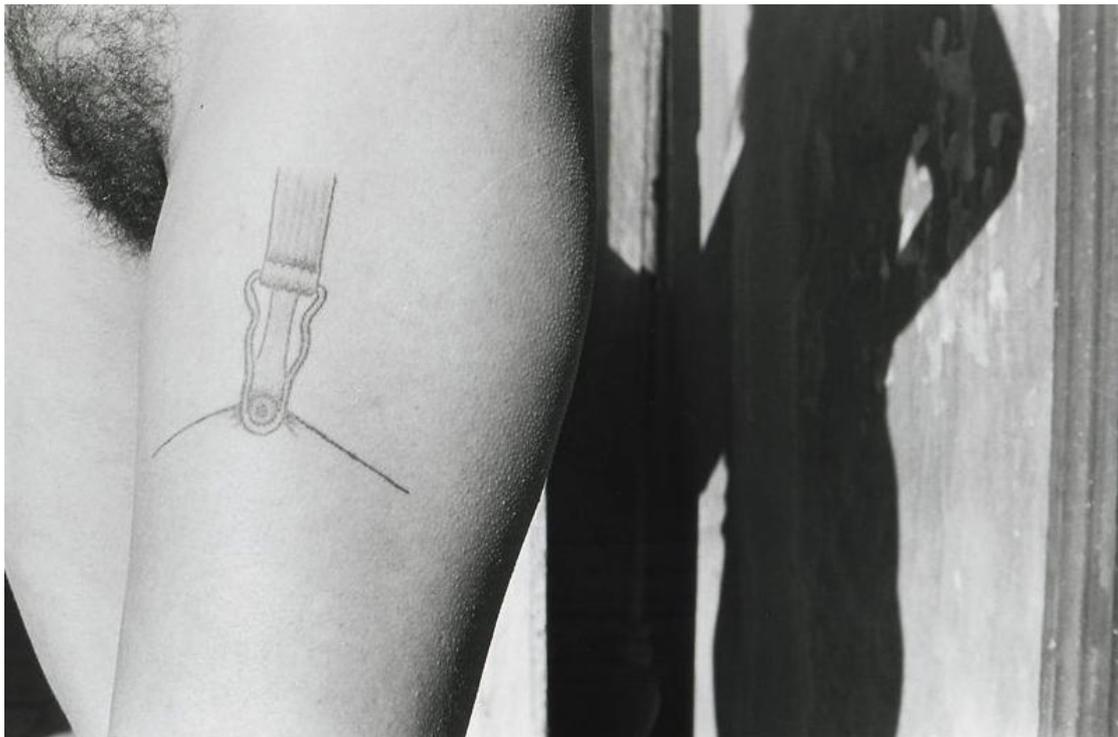


Figure 45: VALIE EXPORT, *Body Sign Action*, 1970, artist performance – tattoo on thigh, Frankfurt.

The symbol of tattoos can mean strength of voice, as a once-transgressive act becomes a symbol of self-control and inner strength. However, the adoption of tattoos by the mainstream has led to subcultures applying a more radical form of modification, which could be said to indicate further their uniqueness and disassociation from the cultural norm. The act of scarification has been adopted, offering an extreme way to visually reveal oneself through pattern.

Steven Connor recognises the importance of the balance between the physical action of tattooing and the end result of the outer motif, and suggests that tattooing is a “particularly complex form of interchange between the injury and the mark” (Connor, 2004: 53) which then determines that the process of marking the skin or even injuring the body’s surface plays as a significant role, reflecting and displaying

self control over the body and determining what happens to it and how it is judged by others.

The act of scarification is practiced widely across Africa and is used to transmit complex messages about identity and social status. The practice of incising the skin with a sharp instrument to control and create marked patterns on it is a long and painful process, but is being adopted as a form of subculture identity in Western societies. The popularity of this process of permanent pattern in the form of scarification tattoos is growing and is seen as a step on from tattooing that has the added raised and tactile element to the pattern (The Brighton Hussy, 2011). Facial scarification in West Africa is used to identify ethnic groups and individuals, and also demonstrate personal beauty (Coleman, 2002). This practice questions the motivations to replicate and adopt these actions in our Western culture, in which the issue of personal beauty can be argued to play a significant role.

The social construction of beauty has been challenged by tattoos; Hardin suggests that tattooing disrupted “the standard Western conventions of beauty” (Hardin, 1999: 91). For women, the body has been a site of contention, objectified by the media as a commodity that is both profitable and controllable and labelled as both sexless and seductive. The adoption of tattoos or body modification by women to indicate control over their body is significant and has been appointed by feminists as a site to defy the expectation of the feminine (Hardin, 1999). In non-Western society, body art has been used as a sign of commodification inscribed upon the woman just prior to her being given to a husband (Hardin 1999: 89). In Western society it can be a location for body politics and a declaration of female opinion and perspective. The application of pattern on our bodies in Western culture has enabled the communication of personal narratives and has become a phenomenon for both women and men. Identities are conveyed through tattooed patterns or words that permanently mark the body. The once-subversive nature of tattoos no longer applies; they are no longer hidden under clothing but are used as an outward display of character.

We all have the commonality of skin that stands immediately between the physical world and ourselves; this commonality therefore provides the possibility of a personal relevance and engagement with an audience that can be powerful and arresting. Artists also have an opportunity to draw our attention to the social construction of beauty through their artworks, addressing ideas that are challenging and thought-provoking. Renee Baert draws our attention to such artists, in her essay *The Dress: Bodies and Boundaries* (2001). She illustrates how artists have used the notion of a ‘second skin’ created through clothing as “surrogates for the body” and provokes us

to rethink women's bodies (Baert, in: Jefferies, 2001: 21). Baert refers to the work of Jane Sterbak, who challenges us on issues concerning women, fashion, consumption and the body. In one of her pieces, Sterbak creates a dress entitled *Vanitas: Flesh for Anorectic Albino* (1987) which is formed and fitted to a standard dressmakers dummy but solely constructed from fresh meat. The dress becomes animated by the gradual decomposing from raw state to cured.

Cathy Daley is an artist inspired by clothing and iconographies of female glamour. Through her drawings and sculptures she dramatically challenges our expectation of body shape and size. Her work depicts garments of extreme exaggerated proportions questioning the inherited boundaries of glamour for women. Artist Alba D'Urbano creates clothing of life-size digital images of her naked body, transforming a 2D image into a 3D tailored shape, which can be seen in her garments *Il Sarto Immortale* ('The immortal Tailor', 1995–97) (Figure 46). These garments impose the images of D'Urbano's body shape including her breasts, stomach, buttocks etc on the body of another woman. She describes this digital process as producing "a virtual entity, a data landscape, a digital abstraction" (Lupton, 2002).



Figure 46: Alba D'Urbano, *The immortal Tailor*, 1995-97, *The Immortal Tailor: T-shirt* 1995-97 Digital print, fabric 37 x 27-1/2 inches. *The Immortal Tailor: Dress* 1995-97 Digital print, fabric 19 x 37 inches. *The Immortal Tailor: Skirt* 1995-97 Digital print, fabric.

Painter Jenny Saville also uses the body to suggest issues relating to women. In her painting *Branded* (Figure 47) an obese nude woman is inscribed on the surface of her skin with adjectives that are often associated with women, such as 'supportive', 'irrational' and 'delicate', challenging our perception of roles. Artists have been able

to reclaim and take back control when defining bodies and their shape, size and beauty. My practice-based study embraces this concept and attempts to use the knowledge gained through research around the areas of skin to translate my own ideas relating to lace and the body and the use of pattern to change and interrupt the surface.



Figure 47: Jenny Saville, *Branded*, 1992, oil and mixed media on canvas, 209.5 x 179 cm.

Conclusion

Skin can be used to transmit a variety of powerful themes through the metaphorical boundaries it creates, both physical and emotional. The physicality of skin has been mimicked by artists and recreated through artificial and natural means to question and subvert, inducing a discourse surrounding representation and identity. It is evident that pattern can play a key role in communicating these ideas when applied to the skin. The construction and structure of lace fabric determines that skin is exposed when worn over the naked body, revealing and concealing the surface of our intimate space as it moves. Skin plays a significant role when understanding the allure of lace, the 'reveal and conceal' display it creates can contribute to sexualisation of the female body. My investigations explore the boundaries created when pattern and skin are placed together and the symbiotic relationship that occurs. Materials that replicate human skin are used to consider the implications of adding pattern to the surface. Hand techniques are combined with digital technology to explore historical lace and to obtain an awareness of materials.

Vintage leather gloves offer a canvas and metaphorical balance between historical connections of propriety and an underlying sexual tension. Latex rubber replicates the texture of skin and offers a connection to materials that suggest erotica and fetishism. The introduction of stitch and surface decoration beautifies and corrupts the surface, changing the appearance of the leather and latex through adornment. The combination of historical pattern applied from the NTU lace archive and my chosen materials adds an uncertainty to the expectation of lace in relation to skin and pattern. Intricate patterns become sites of disruption on the surface of the leather; stitching, piercing and burning are applied in an attempt to disfigure the appearance of the skin through adornment.

A balance is created that considers the duality of lace that encompasses opposing themes around beauty and repulsion. A tension is explored through the erotic associations connected with leather gloves and latex fabric, enabling an examination into the potential for a visceral relationship with the viewer and object. Traditional techniques are applied to the surface of the fabric, making a connection with gender specific crafts. However, unconventional materials are also used to embellish the surface to add a questioning of ornamentation and exploration of adornment.

Traditional craft processes can offer the artist a vehicle to transmit metaphors in art that can be powerful and arresting. The following chapter considers these implications and explores the influences and perceptions of stitch in creative practices. A historical framework is set out to reflecting upon the re-appropriation by women artists to redefine handwork and the social construction of the feminine through stitch. Contemporary practitioners are also considered to establish an insight into the variety of themes that are being used through these ends to transmit contemporary ideas.

Chapter Five: Stitch in Contemporary Art

Introduction

This chapter reflects on the craft-based process of hand and machine embroidery as a tool for communication in contemporary art. It briefly follows the journey by women to reclaim and define stitch as more than a pastime or gender informed labour.

Instead it addresses how embroidery has contributed to a redefining of the perception of the feminine. The chapter does not enter the debate on the position of craft in fine art; it acknowledges that the merging boundaries are producing exciting and challenging work that is recognised as art. Bradley Quinn, in the opening text of *Contemporary Textiles: the fabric of fine art* (2008), states that the work of contemporary artists including Tracey Emin, Lucy Orta, Rosemary Trockel “reveal how textiles bridge diverse narratives more easily than other media, and spark interpretations that are both literal and metaphorical” (Quinn, in: Monem, 2008: 10).

This chapter highlights artists who have used the craft of embroidery and stitch as a valid and successful medium in contemporary art practice. It also acknowledges how both hand and digital embroidery has been introduced and applied in my own work to convey themes around gender, beauty and sexuality. The following section reflects on this application in an attempt to make sense of themes and concepts developing in my work.

Stitch: in my practice

My childhood experience of stitch was that of wearing uncomfortable ‘girlie’ dresses for church that were sewn and hand finished by my grandmother. The idea of sewing and femininity imbued in me a sense of rebellion when it came to the expectations and restrictions of growing up in the Brethren movement where women’s roles and pastimes were clearly and narrowly defined. Adopting the process of hand-sewing for the first time since a tray cloth in my childhood was an intrepid experience and one I was surprised to take. I felt an instinctive pull towards hand-stitching, wanting to experience the tactility of the materials and a process that was completely driven, controlled and produced by me. I decided that I would think about the needle as a pencil and attempt to make the marks and shapes through experimentation. The repetitive process of piercing, pulling, wrapping and twisting soon became a therapeutic and contemplative process, with results that grew into crustaceans and masses that undulated on the surface of the leather gloves I used to experiment with.

I wanted to create surfaces that suggested a duality of beauty and repulsion. The application of adornment on the surface of the leather had a potential to demonstrate infestation, restriction, deformation and disruption. I attempted to achieve this through the use of silk thread, beads, human hair, wire, iron filings and latex. Stitch was used to apply the materials but also to create the textural surfaces. The process was long and sometimes painful with my own skin getting worn and perforated in the process of repeatedly stitching through leather. The act of making became ritualistic and an enjoyable process, giving me time to focus and plan while watching the threads grow and mutate to a tactile surface. The process of stitch provided me with a means to express ideas that were developing in my practice it added a charge to the material surface linking the object with thoughts and feeling about the themes I was endeavouring to portray. I was interested in the connection stitch has made with the female voice and how it had contributed to the defining of the feminine.

Stitch: to define the feminine

Embroidery has been a significant activity for women as both a form of labour in the work place and as a craft hobby in the home. The historical associations of embroidery can reflect an inhibited woman who is suppressed by class and position, a silent voice only communicating through stitch. Samplers from the nineteenth century reflect intense workmanship and many hours of work, often taught in schools as part of young girls education they demonstrated needlework skills and 'dutiful piety' (V&A, 2011). The Victoria and Albert Museum has within its collection a unique sampler from the nineteenth century by Elisabeth Parker (1813–1889). Parker recounts her life through stitch, describing her family situation, the cruelty from employers and her attempted suicide. This deeply personal confession is used to reveal the feelings of a woman repressed and trapped by her circumstance, with only the process of stitch to convey her despair which is reflected in the closing line of her sampler 'what will become of my soul' (V&A, 2011). Stitch allowed Parker to reveal herself freely, sharing the harsh reality of her life but also through a pastime that brought pleasure to many women isolated and confined to their homes.

This duality is referred to by the late Rozsika Parker (1945–2010), who establishes that stitch has "provided a source of pleasure and power for women, while being indissolubly linked to their powerlessness" (Parker, 2010: 11). Parker reinforces these sentiments in her seminal book *The Subversive Stitch*, offering the reader an historical study of embroidery but not with the usual focus on style and technique. She explores the meaning of stitch in the context of the social, economic and cultural

importance of stitch to women. The book challenges the formation of femininity not technique, and the divisive use of stitch to convey new thought. Victoria Mitchell, in her tribute to Parker, praises the provocative nature of the book that has allowed us to understand stitch as a process “to be active, to think, to question, to invert, to subvert, and above all to be heard” (Mitchell, 2011: 210). Textiles provided a channel for women to reveal themselves through familiar processes indicating inner feelings that had remained hidden and suppressed.

However, textiles have not been recognised in the critical studies of art and design which has been said by Virginia Troy Gardner to be due to a number of reasons. She entitles them “objects of neglect” and blames gender bias and the nature of the medium for confusion on the placement it has in critical and historical discourses (Troy Gardner, 2006:15). Troy Gardner draws our attention to the powerful interplay that modernist textiles played in providing a channel of expression that could not be achieved by other media. Her reference to the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or ‘total work of art’ (i.e., the synthesis of art and life as a condition of modernity), introduces us to a way of thinking that embraced textiles as a “noble art” through the writing of William Morris, who exalted the hours of skilled labour to produce a tapestry or embroidered silk (Troy Gardner, 2006: 20).

We are also introduced through Troy Gardner to many women who used the medium of stitch to express new thought in the pursuit of a fairer system of equality. This includes the artist Hannah Hoch, a commercial designer from 1916 to 1926, and an avant-garde artist whose embroidered photomontages that sometimes included nude women frolicking amongst flowers and trees challenged the conventional notions of gender, beauty and consumer culture (Troy Gardner, 2006: 47). This development in the modernist textiles movement set a new precedent in the applications of stitch, weave and design to have subversive and political content.

The Pattern and Decoration movement of the 1970s had more women than other art movements, and all of the women feminists. ‘Women’s work’ (i.e., the roles traditionally assigned to women by patriarchal societies) became the focus of a number of the artists including Miriam Schapiro, Joyce Kozloff, Valerie Jaudon, Jane Kaufman and Cynthia Carlson (Schwartz, 2007). These artists reworked processes associated with the everyday, including quilting, embroidery and beadwork, to create artworks that challenged the conventions of the art world unsettling the boundaries and associated stereotypes of feminism and art.

This reclamation of 'women's work' was set to destabilise through craft techniques but was not done to reject femininity. Instead, as Parker states when describing the work of feminist artist Kate Walker, it was done to "empty the term of its negative connotations, to reclaim and refashion the category" (Parker, 2010: 207). Walker describes her use of embroidery and the potential undermining associations it has with "sweetness, passivity and obedience" as not subverting her work. Walker believes that femininity and sweetness are a woman's strength and what is needed is to create a form of stitch that reflects "physical and mental skills" and that this strength should not be mistaken (Parker, 2010: 207).

The feminist art projects by Judy Chicago in the 1970s became cultural and conceptual monuments to feminist art, with amateur craft the central theme. One of the projects, *The Dinner Party* (1974–79), challenged the perception of women in a historical and symbolic role, while celebrating women's artistic accomplishments. This project reflected a change in how stitch could be used to not only celebrate women, and their importance historically but also to unsettle, displaying political craft that fought back from the domesticity that had become imposed.

This movement by women to re-appropriate craft as a vehicle for change was also reflected in two large touring exhibitions: *Embroidery in Women's Lives 1300–1900* and *Women and Textiles Today* which started in Manchester in 1988. Both exhibitions raised ideas that had been explored in the *Subversive Stitch*, although each exhibition complimented each other they had differing themes. *Embroidery in Women's Lives 1300–1900* emphasised gender and class in a social context, whilst *Women and Textiles Today* investigated the relationship between women, textiles and femininity and the connections with the "hierarchical and gendered value system of the visual arts" (Barnett, 1995). Curator Pennina Barnett found that when she read the visitors book at Wolverhampton Art Gallery reviews were mixed and conveyed both 'engagement and recognition or anger and disappointment' (Deepwell, 1995). This judgement was especially true of the contemporary work displayed in the exhibition *Women and Textiles Today* (1988), Barnett addressed the response in her essay *Afterthoughts on curating The Subversive Stitch* (Barnett In: Deepwell, 1995). She describes the responses as "not going beyond issues of categorisation" of 'women' and 'textiles', she responded with the opinion that it is important that we go further and expand the framework to encompass "diverse practices" and "new discourses" (Barnett, in: Deepwell, 1995: 84). Barnett also addresses the definition of women and femininity as not predetermined and explicit, so that the ideas about textiles "vary across time, place and culture" (Barnett, in:

Deepwell, 1995: 82). Sixteen years on from her essay, art textiles have become increasingly visible along with the process of stitch to communicate powerful themes that challenge and make us ask questions. Artist, writer and curator Janis Jefferies, is excited about the possibilities of textiles both material and technological and states that “textiles are at the very vanguard of contemporary art practice and social change today” and have “the potential to transform the way we think” (Jefferies, in: Monem 2008: 58).

The voice of women expressed through stitch has become strong and meaningful, translating lives through a familiar technique, with an everyday narrative of experience that is truthful and current. Turner Prize nominee (in 1999) Tracey Emin is one of the leading women artists from the ‘Britart’ or ‘Young British Artist’ (YBA) movement who has embraced fabric and stitch to convey and visually confront personal issues. Emin does however write that she has “no interest in the feminist politics of embroidery” and it has been said that she does it because “she is good at it” (Robertson, in: Buszek, 2011: 195). Kirsty Robertson argues that although Emin's politics might be “disengaged”, her very presence in celebrated and prestigious galleries implicates her in representing the “ghosts of textile artists and workers” who did not gain access to such establishments. Emin has used stitch in her work on a number of occasions, in a tent appliquéd with the names of past lovers entitled *Everyone I have ever slept with 1963–1995* (1995), which was one of her first and most noted artworks. Louise Bourgeois also became a highly regarded artist who used cloth and stitch to convey potent metaphors that relate to her personal experiences. Themes of mothering and nurturing are used to challenge the events of her childhood. Bourgeois uses cloth that she has collected over many years to powerfully translate her memories through stitched fabric.

Traditional craft making is becoming a contemporary force that is allowing women to reveal themselves with powerful and defiant voices that communicate through the familiar visual language of embroidery. Artists Tilleke Schwartz and Andrea Dezso both revisit traditional samplers, recreating them to reflect issues that affect or are part of women’s lives. Schwartz produces open-ended narratives that depict graffiti, icons and imagery that engage the viewer in a relationship that requires them to complete and decipher the art piece (Figure 48). Dezso revisits the traditional embroidery samplers of her native Transylvania, and produces more literal translations of social and moral narratives based on the relationship with her mother. Dezso and Schwartz both re-define the traditional sampler to encompass their lives as contemporary freethinking women dealing with the everyday.



Figure 49: Orly Cogan, *Natures Secrets*, 2007, hand- stitched embroidery on vintage linen, 187 x 187 cm.

Major exhibitions have contributed to highlighting and celebrating artists who have chosen to use textiles and the process of craft techniques. The series of *ArtTextiles* (1, 2 & 3) (1996, 2000, 2004) exhibitions at Bury St Edmunds Art Gallery provide a survey of recent practice with a view to stimulating debate on the use of textiles in art. It also gave to contemporary artists the opportunity to engage with the idea of textiles and the platform to exhibit at a national exhibition.

Pricked: Extreme Embroidery (2008), curated by the Museum of Art & Design in New York, invited 48 artists to demonstrate the diversity of embroidery. The show included the work by Angelo Filomeno, *Death of a Blind Philosopher* (2006), which depicts an embroidered skeleton whose eye sockets have been violated, facing a blood red

explosion of tendrils and blossoms attacked by flies and cockroaches. Filomeno learnt his craft as a child and is now a master of embroidery, creating intricately stunning stitched work. Elaine Reichek embroidered an 80 foot-long transparent curtain with dots and dashes that spell out the first telegraph message sent by Samuel F. B. Morse on May 24, 1844: "What hath God wrought" (2007).

Digital stitch was the focus of the exhibition *Closely Held Secrets* (2010) at the Bonington Gallery Nottingham. It brought together the work of nine artists to collaborate with embroidery technician Tony Taylor and research assistant Tessa Acti, translating works into embroidered artefacts that addressed issues of sexuality, gender, ornamentation, craft and technology. Included was the work of Grayson Perry, Stella Whalley and Craig Fisher.

Conclusion

Stitch has become an accepted and powerful medium for artists both male and female to communicate their ideas. This brief historical framework of stitch and embroidery in contemporary art practice aims to illustrate the vast potential and applications that have arisen through the process of stitching cloth. The historical implications of stitch can offer the practitioner a platform to challenge the perceptions of gender and the role of women. It offers powerful, resonating metaphors that confront and challenge impressions of position and place in the context of the female role.

When discovering hand stitch for myself, exploring an unfamiliar process opened new challenges and discoveries. With little knowledge and no formal training I broke rules with ignorance and abandon, creating shapes and marks on the surface of the materials. What added to my exploration and enjoyment was the physical process of pricking, stabbing, cutting and pulling, inducing cathartic steps of emotional satisfaction that were sealed and concealed in a decorative exterior that shrouded the intentionality of the operations that had been performed. My pursuit of stitch to apply texture, beauty and repulsion embodied the metaphorical meaning I had found imbued in lace fabric and encompassed a means to express theories I had pursued of objectification, sexualisation and eroticisation that contributed to my new visual expression.

The following chapter comprises of a broad conceptual and practical analysis of the final artworks produced for my exhibition *Lacuna* (2012), a solo show in the Bonington gallery, Nottingham. This section of the thesis recounts the journey of exploration and discovery in my practice that engages with processes used and

themes pursued to create and display works that transmit the concepts formed through theoretical research.

Chapter Six: Outcomes of the Research Process

Introduction

This chapter sets out to explore the outcomes of the research process through a summarisation of the thesis development and the parallel process of creative discovery to produce a new body of work. It explores the evolution of the manufacturing process to create artworks that investigate the physical relationship pattern has with the body and the metaphorical associations connected with lace and skin. The chapter ends with a description of my exhibition *Lacuna* (2012), Bonington Gallery, Nottingham, a solo show that represents the accumulation of work produced to express ideas explored as part of this inquiry.

Developing my concept

When this inquiry started I had my art practice and the Nottingham Trent University lace archive. I had no expectation of where it would lead or how it would change me as a practitioner. Subsequently, I became immersed in a world of academic research and critical thinking amongst lots of beautiful, intricate and delicate historical lace. The lace archive offered me a vast resource; I was overwhelmed by the volume and visually seduced by its beautiful patterns and structures. I started this research with an attempt to define lace to understand what sets it apart from other fabrics.

Through the introduction of reflection and action research I gained a new process of learning and understanding. Familiar practices were subjected to methods that reflected on my choice and selection of themes and ideas. I began by questioning my way of working through mind maps and reflective journals, breaking down elements of interest into areas of study to explore further through academic literature.

My practice became a channel to experiment with ideas through my theoretical reading and understanding. Literature became a necessary part of my process; it fed me with new ways of thinking and opened me up to a discourse that was a necessity for change to happen. My studio became a new working environment that introduced the ideas and theories of others to stimulate my own thoughts. I became a gatherer of things that triggered ideas around lace, surrounding myself with a resource of raw materials that now included written works, and printed matter as well as pieces of lace, vintage fabrics, leather opera gloves and craft materials.

I was introduced to the thoughts of other researchers who instigated reflection on my developing ideas, although the study was not a collaborative process the input

became a valuable means to further my understanding. Paul Carter claims the value of intervention and working collaboratively as an obvious focus of creative research, stating that “It is this back-and forth, in a way that advances or changes the pattern” and that this sort of creative vision makes sense of the “gaps, interruptions and unpredictable crossovers” (Carter, 2004: 5). This intervention into my practice triggered new academic reading and creative discourse; I was exposed to the practices, thoughts and the ideas of others, which offered me a new way of thinking that could be applied to my study of lace.

To understand lace in the context of art and design I turned to a number of international exhibitions including *Lace in Translation* (2010), *Love Lace* (2011) and *Lost in Lace* (2012) all had used ideas around lace to bring together artists and designers. The majority of the artworks in these exhibitions played with ideas around the decorative construction and process of making. My interest lay in artists that encompassed both the structural and metaphorical value of lace and played with the duality and ambiguity of lace to embrace multiple associations such as the work of Doris Salcedo, Ann Wilson and Kira O’Reilly. They helped me to question the meaning of lace to be more than a decorative historical fabric but also a powerful signifier of domesticity, sexualisation and exploitation.

The method of case studies took me further into the world of creative practice and concept development and introduced me directly to artists and designers who were using lace in their work. Through structured and unstructured interviews I became more aware of how lace was being used to translate ideas. I became conscious that the psychological associations with lace can be separated into two groups of thought: white lace for purity and black lace tarnished with the veil of death and sexualisation. The duality and ambiguity of lace became my preoccupation, and concepts in my practice began to form around the ideas of skin, beauty and the qualities of lace to both repel as well as attract.

These ideas were investigated through fashion and clothing connecting lace and our outer surface. This led to explorations of the metaphorical value and power of clothing when placed on areas of the body. My interest lay in the change of lace fabric from a display of status and wealth to a fabric with sexual overtones that offered a paradoxical display of purity, obedience and seduction.

A pivotal moment came when I starting reading George Simmel’s essay on adornment (in: Frisby & Featherstone, 2000: 192). Ideas came together when I read Simmel’s analogy of the positioning of jewellery and clothing in relation to the body

and their potential to transmit signs and signals. When applying this notion to my research I made links to suggest that lace sits in a unique and personal space on the body – not directly on the skin like tattoos, but in an intimate space between clothing and skin.

This emotive boundary of skin became an area of interest in my own practice and also as a research area in the context of contemporary art (Chapter Four: 102). I investigated the connection of pattern and skin to generate a cultural form of communication that is both sexual and political and the interface that can be created through the application of pattern to adorn and scar the surface. The physicality of mimicked human skin provided me with a material and canvas to explore my creative ideas. This was achieved through the use of pre-worn vintage leather opera gloves and latex rubber each material adding to the associations of sexuality and erotica.

Lace pattern was explored through motifs found in a design portfolio *Ornamentale Zierformen Nach Der Natur* ('Ornamental Decorative Shapes From Nature') (1910) in the Nottingham Trent lace archive. The historical lace motifs formed a starting point to explore pattern and the potential application of pattern onto my chosen materials. I was interested in investigating lace pattern but not replicating it as a fabric. My aim was to suggest lace pattern through connecting associations and structural qualities and to engage the viewer with a decorative display that implies the properties of an ornamental construction through insinuation rather than literal translation.

The connection between pattern and skin was achieved through the application of hand and digital machine embroidery. Stitch offered a process that has been used by contemporary artists to redefine the feminine and express ideas around gender and self-expression as referenced in chapter Five. Like lace, embroidery is strongly connected with the female and can be successfully used as a theme or technique to challenge our expectations and the conventions attached to women.

The application of embroidery as a process offered the flexibility to incorporate multiple materials and ways to translate pattern, decoration and introduce new digital techniques into my practice. I was interested in exploring through stitch themes around beauty and repulsion making a connection with the theoretical ideas I had formed in my thesis around the duality of lace to attract and repel, reveal and conceal (Chapter Two: 46).

The following section explains the process of manufacture bringing together the artworks that explore ideas around skin and historical lace pattern. The section starts with the seven white leather vintage opera gloves, all developed as individual

explorations but all expressing the same themes around the body and adornment. Latex fabric is introduced in the following section through the ideas and manufacture behind the artworks *Skin Quilt* and *Skin 1–5*, which are explained through their connection with the motifs found in the NTU lace archive. The last section closes the chapter and explains the reasoning and choices made behind the curation of my exhibition *Lacuna* (2012) that displayed artworks produced as part of the inquiry.

The manufacture of the artworks

Gloves: one to seven

Each leather opera glove represents an investigation and exploration into the intimate personal space created through the engagement of lace pattern on skin. They explore theoretical ideas in my thesis triggered by George Simmel's essay on adornment (in: Frisby & Featherstone, 2000: 192). The implications of these ideas are examined in connection with lace and the decorated, objectified and sexualised female body. Beauty is questioned through the application of textures and patterns adorning the surface of the leather and creating highly embellished landscapes. Long leather gloves allude to touch and sexuality, ideas that are further enhanced through stitch and decorative applications to draw attention to sensuous and delicate spaces. Historical motifs were chosen from the design portfolio *Ornamentale Zierformen Nach Der Natur* ('Ornamental Decorative Shapes From Nature') (1910) found in the NTU lace archive. The designs questioned my expectations of the traditional interpretations of flora and fauna found in lace and this allowed for a less conventional more fluid approach to pattern (Figure 37).

The laser machine was explored as a mark-making tool to translate the patterns I had found. The technique was capable of etching the surface of the leather replicating the branding or tattooing of skin. Hand sketches were scanned and manipulated in an Adobe *Illustrator* computer programme then converted into a Live Trace on the Ethos software compatible with a laser cutter. Time was spent with the digital embroidery technician, Tessa Acti, experimenting with scale, velocity and speed to manipulate the outcomes of the machine and create the detail and intricacy without burning through the fabric (Figure 50). Templates were made to determine the placement of the motif and samples of leather from vintage leather gloves were used to understand the variation in thickness. This was important to determine the movement of the machine to negate the formality of a fixed design and create a template that I had control over. The historical lace pattern was broken down into

various elements so that the surface of the glove could be covered with an organic pattern and not the formal repetition of design. Each etched motif was hand directed and placed on either the inside or outside of the glove using the laser as a drawing tool to create various textures and marks on each surface. I was often enthralled and overtaken with the intensity of the process so revisiting and reflecting on the ideas and concepts I set out to achieve became a key element of the process of manufacture (Figure 51).



Figure 50: Joy Buttress, laser etched glove sample (2010)

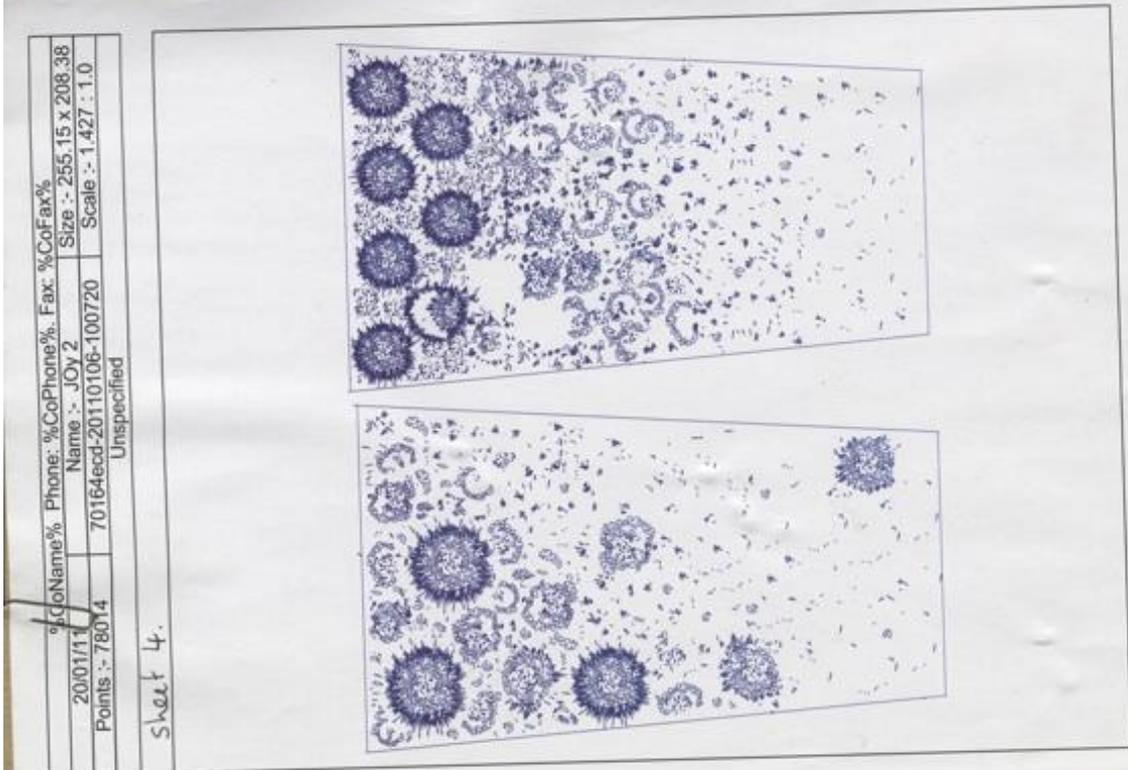


Figure 51: Joy Buttress, sketchbook (etching samples) (2011)

20: 1: 11

After intensive sampling and experimentation it is time to reflect on the processes ~~past~~ and the intended outcome. I need to reflect on my initial concept and translate those ideas through this piece of work.

Gloves: protect - reveal + conceal
 making connections with the material and the material.

taking the historical motifs and layering into the skin - growing, creeping, encapsulating

→ Vintage glove - warm

used materials are profoundly human; they will be speak the presence of a human being' Denis Salcedo.

* think about S.R.S
 What is it trying to tell the viewer?
 What is it revealing?
 Which parts of the glove reveal + conceal - the sensors parts of the glove.
 What significance are the patterns of motifs - how do they grow on the surface?

Glove One (Figure 53) and *Glove Two* (Figure 54) both display the investigations and explorations brought about through my use of a laser cutter to translate pattern on the surface of the leather. Laser etching was combined with decorative embroidered stitch adding to the textural surface and creating an unconventional appearance.

On subsequent gloves I experimented further with the use of embroidery to create textural landscapes questioning the expectation and placement of pattern to produce unfamiliar decoration. Mounds of beads and networks of threads explored the contours of each glove to create a tension between the form and function of the object. In *Glove Three* (Figure 55), *Glove Five* (Figure 57) and *Glove Six* (Figure 58) migrations of threads and bead, cluster in the crevasses of the hands suggesting discomfort and irritation; changing the focus from the whole hand and instead drawing attention to intricate details in intimate and sensuous areas (Figure 52).



Figure 52: Joy Buttriss, *Glove Five* – detail (2012)

Glove Four (Figure 56) and *Glove Seven* (Figure 59) experiment further with materials investigating ways to simulate texture and pattern. *Glove Four* examines the artificial replication of stitch through an application of magnets and iron powder creating raised mounds that mimic heavily embroidered cloth. *Glove Seven* explores dense pattern and texture. Silk flowers dipped in liquid latex become an extension of the skins surface creating an impenetrable boundary that is both decorative and unyielding.

All the gloves became outpourings of ideas, experimental and exploratory. The gloves although finished art pieces represent individual reflections on pattern on skin, formed over the course of the inquiry. They started with ideas around the direct translation of historical lace patterns and developed into separate examinations that investigated the implications of textural placement. This was achieved through materials that penetrated, veiled and interrupted the surface of the leather.



Figure 53: Joy Buttriss, *Glove One*, 2012, hand embroidery, laser etched leather, vintage leather glove, silk thread.



Figure 54: Joy Buttriss, *Glove Two*, 2012, laser etched, hand embroidered, vintage leather glove, paint, string.



Figure 55: Joy Buttress, *Glove Three*, 2012, hand embroidered, vintage leather glove, human hair, glass beads, silk thread.



Figure 56: Joy Buttriss, *Glove Four*, 2012, vintage leather glove, magnets, iron powder.



Figure 57: Joy Butress, *Glove Five*, 2012, hand embroidered, cotton thread beads.



Figure 58: Joy Buttriss, *Glove Six*, 2012, hand embroidered, vintage leather glove, cotton thread.



Figure 59: Joy Buttress, *Glove Seven*, 2012, hand embroidered, vintage leather glove, silk flowers, latex.

Latex artworks

The use of latex rubber, found household linens and a Barudan digital multi-head embroidery machine became the start of further experimentation. The use of latex rubber introduced me to a material that offered the flexibility of a fabric sheet and the ability to be formed, dipped or painted as a liquid. Latex also offered me a surface that replicated human skin through colour, texture and connection with 'second skin' clothing in fetish fashion.

The properties of latex as a fabric determined that garments are often glued together rather than stitched as difficulties often occur when trying to penetrate the surface. This offered me a challenge and an opportunity to explore a material that had unpredictable outcomes and would not replicate the usual manifestations of embroidered patterns. The combination of digital technology and an unconventional material allowed me to start to push the boundaries of stitch. Engaging the embroidery machine in an unfamiliar procedure subverted the process to pull, pierce and distort the fabric in an action that was self-controlled and determined. I was able to control the digital embroidery machine as a creative tool, altering length and density of stitch, tension and balance of threads, to produce interventions on the surface.

My use of latex in this way created a surface that had a duality like lace of beauty and repulsion. The potential to embed meaning and emotive boundaries through the application of decoration offered me a new and undiscovered area to explore in my practice through the application of digital embroidery.

Historical patterns found in the design portfolio *Ornamentale Zierformen Nach Der Natur* ('Ornamental Decorative Shapes From Nature') (1910) were digitised through my sketches and translated into a Wilcom software programme. This converted my drawings into a variety of digital stitches that replicated the chosen patterns. Many hours were spent experimenting with scale, tension and threads to create textural surfaces that could be stitched out on the latex fabric. Once this had been established the historical lace motifs designs became embroidered interventions on the surface, providing an unusual conflict that pulled and puckered the surface to look like the brutal scarification of human skin (Figure 61).

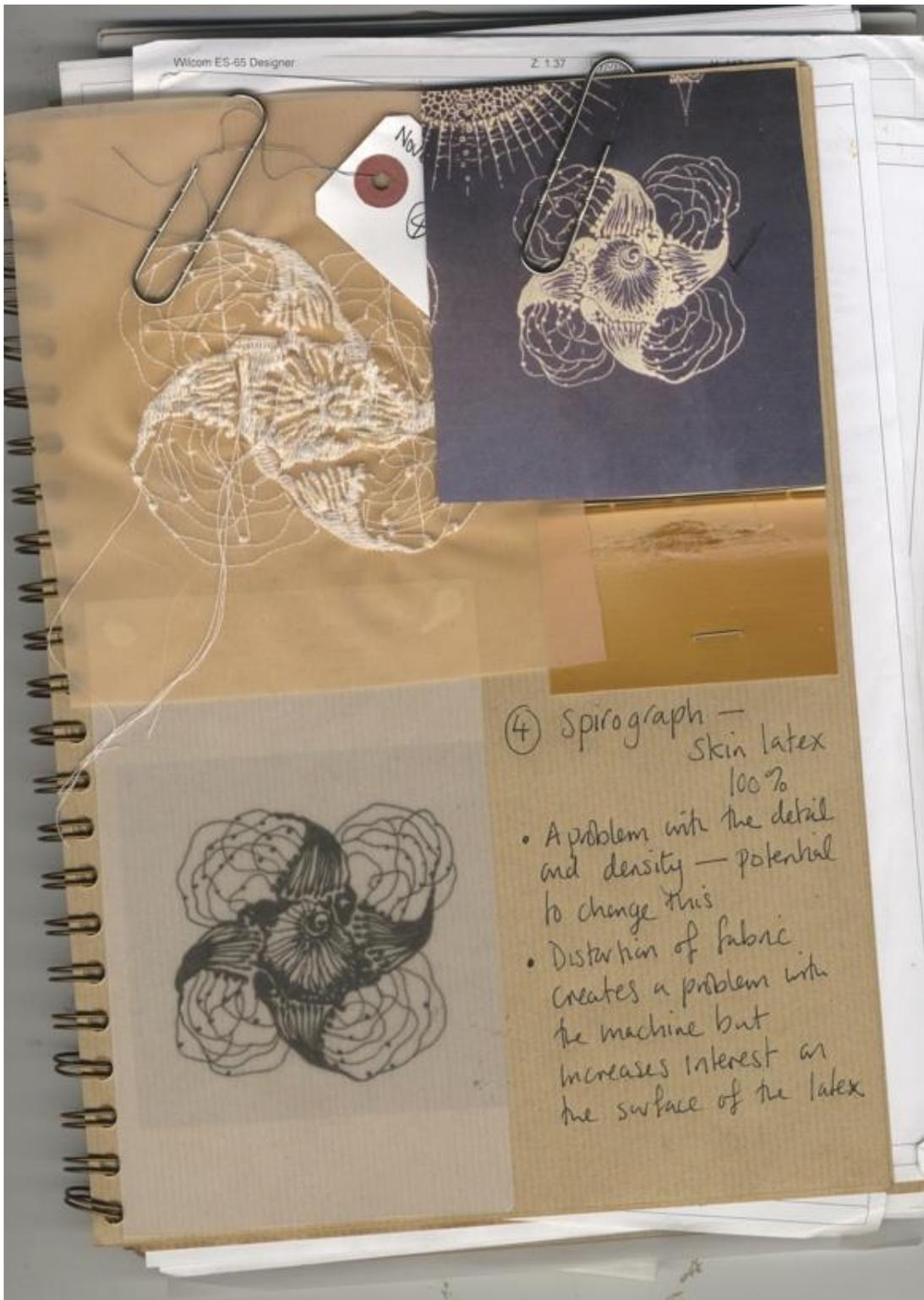


Figure 60: Joy Buttriss, Sketchbook (digital embroidery sampling), (2011).

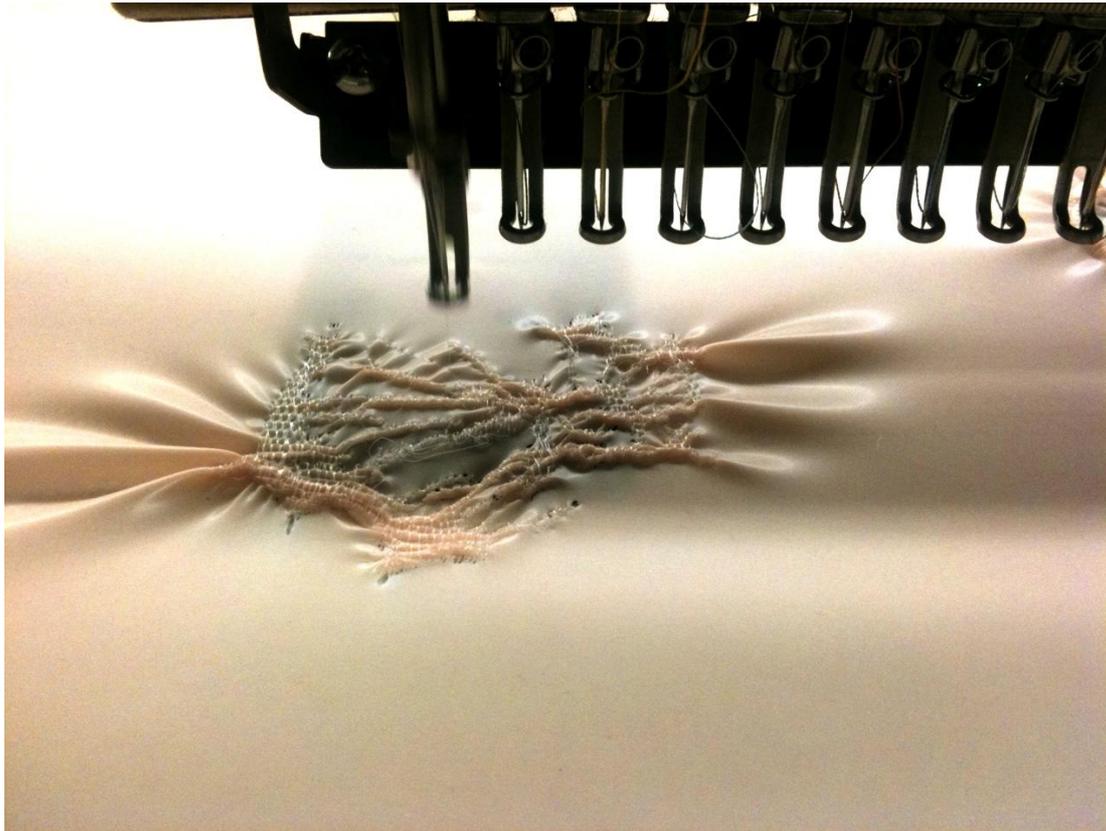


Figure 61: Joy Buttress, latex sample being stitched out on the Barudan multihead embroidery machine (2009).

My initial intention for these experimentations was to use these unconventional embroideries to produce a traditional piece of craft. I was interested in creating a familiar domestic object that was connected to women through the process of stitch.

Patchwork quilts have traditionally been made by women and are used and displayed as part of a domestic interior. The making of a patchwork quilt is simple and accessible, the fabric used is often recycled from clothing and interior cloth to create a new cover. Quilts are closely connected and associated with the body, they enclose and warm us offering security and an intimate connection with our personal space.

The artwork *Skin Quilt* (Figure 62) was produced to suggest a 'second skin'. This provided the opportunity to explore the interesting dichotomy between the comfort and protection of a cover and the repulsion of wrapping the body in an alien skin. Embroidery was used to represent the traditional application of stitch on quilts and to explore further the use of pattern.

At first glance *Skin Quilt* evoked a cover that offered warmth and comfort, however on closer inspection the use of unorthodox materials changed the viewers

expectation. Traditional associations were destabilised through the subversion of familiar cloth that had been replaced with a fabric that replicated human skin and looked, smelt and felt uncomfortable. The quilt no longer symbolised warmth and security instead it created a surface that exposed and revealed the visceral self. The uncertainty was increased through the application of hundreds of buttons and beads some covered in latex that suggested the appearance of mould, settling and infesting the creases, corners and edges of the artwork.



Figure 62: Joy Buttress, *Skin Quilt*, 2012, hand embroidery, digital embroidery, latex fabric, cotton, buttons, wadding and beads, Bonington Gallery, Nottingham, photos Marko Dutka.

In my pursuit to investigate these ideas further I explored the application of stitch onto latex fabric with an intention of creating large scale artworks. In *Skin Quilt* I had used pre-formed latex fabric bought in lengths but I was concerned that over a wider expanse the material once embroidered and stretched would rip and tear. Therefore I experiment with layers of liquid latex poured and rolled to produce a fabric. Through this technique I created a series of five 1m x 1m square latex sheets reinforced with a fabric scrim edge to provide stability and stretch when installing the art works. This technique also enabled me to create latex sheets of varying thicknesses, discolorations and flaws that appeared to mimic more accurately the imperfections of human skin.

Once again I worked from historical lace designs taken from the portfolio in the lace archive and translated into digital programmes for the Barudan digital embroidery machine. The scale was increased and a clear monofilament thread was used to disguise the pattern and suggest scarring and disruptions that pulled and twisted the fabric. The combination of the inconsistent surface, scale and thread, created a disfigured texture that played with a paradoxical display of beauty and repulsion. *Skin 1–5* (Figure 63) was conceived and produced creating large scale wall art pieces, the skin sheets once pulled and stretched in installation increased in detail displaying a landscape of holes and marks created through the piercing of the needle. Through these artworks the technique of stitch replicated the branding and marking of human skin and in doing so questioned our perception of beauty through disfigurement (Figure 64). All these artworks bring together themes and ideas conceived through explorations that investigated the relationship of pattern on skin while considering the metaphorical value of lace in contemporary art.



Figure 63: Joy Buttriss, *Skin*, 2012, digital embroidery, liquid latex, monofilament, hand forged nails, Bonington Gallery, Nottingham, photos Marko Dutka.

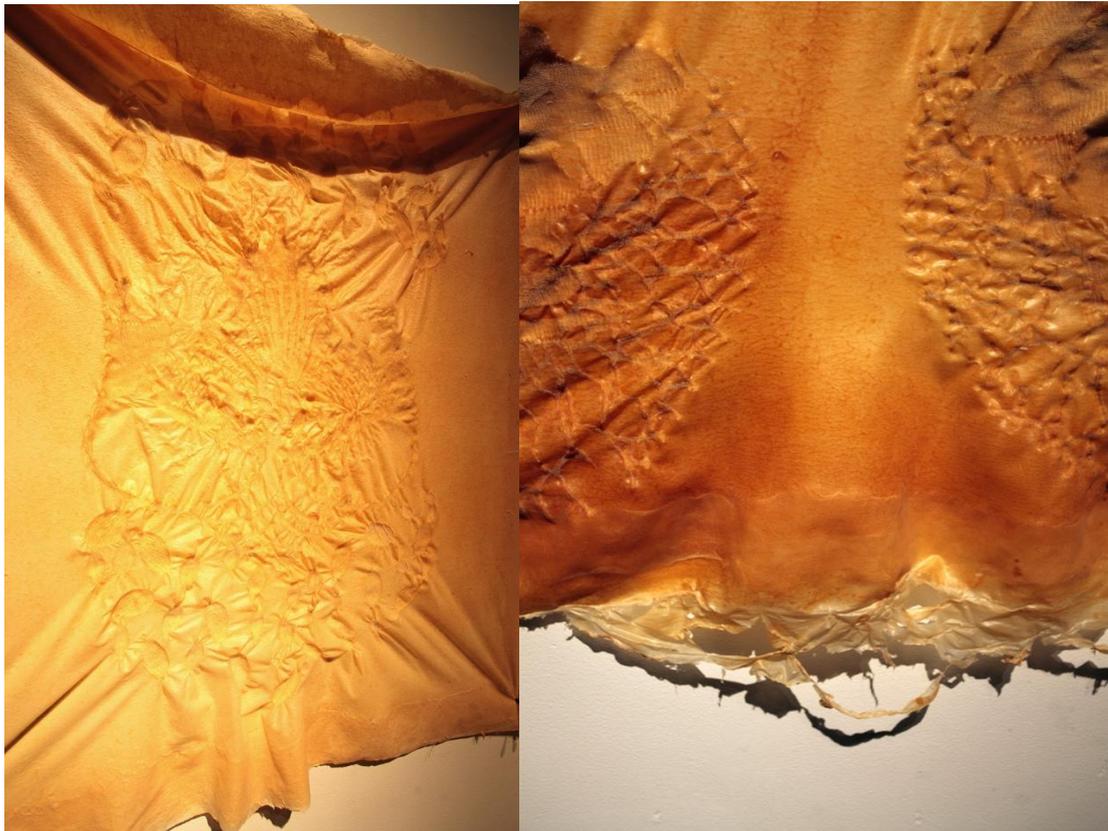


Figure 64: Joy Buttriss, *Skin*, 2012, digital embroidery, liquid latex, monofilament, hand forged nails, Bonington Gallery, Nottingham, photos Marko Dutka.

Lacuna (2012) - Exhibition

In a work of art, the lacuna is an interruption in the figurative fabric.

Cesare Brandi, 2005:58

The exhibition *Lacuna* (2012) explored conceptual themes conceived through my doctoral inquiry. My intention for the body of artwork produced was for it to be experienced as a whole installation in which the individual artworks were metaphorical chapters of discovery. The exhibition was displayed in such a way that the visitor experienced and engaged with the outcomes of the research on a number of levels, encountering the themes through both the display of the exhibition and the viewing of the objects. The language, suggestion and metaphors of lace underpinned the display, challenging the viewer on a personal and intimate level through their questioning of lace fabric. The artworks alluded to lace as more than an intricate openwork pattern of threads but also an embodiment of sexual and erotic intention.

Stepping into the gallery, one entered a darkened space that was interspersed with seven pillars created by stacks of packing boxes (Figure 65). The viewer was led on a journey from the macrocosm of the large exhibition space to the microcosm of the hidden world inside the packing boxes. From entering the communal expanse of the gallery, the eye was drawn to shafts of light from individual holes drilled in the sides of the boxes, offering an intimate viewing experience (Figure 66). My intention was to control the line of gaze, allowing for an intense and detailed encounter by bridging the gap between the haptic and optical to create a powerful sensuous interplay (Figure 67). Standing behind the small hole was a filled leather glove to suggest a hand, covered in pattern, adornment and detail. The view hole was not quite big enough to make visibility comfortable or satisfying, only revealing a small detailed section of the object (Figure 68 & Figure 69)



Figure 65: Joy Buttreff, *Lacuna*, 2012, Bonington Gallery, Nottingham, image Marko Dutka.

The voyeuristic act of a peep show is referenced through the physical action of getting up close and peering through the drilled hole, creating an intimate visual experience that bridges the gap between space and object. This sensuous engagement generates what Laura Marks describes as “Haptic Visuality” (see Chapter Two: 46) and which suggests an erotic encounter. Marks defines haptic visuality as a form of perception in which the eyes function more like organs of touch: “Haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth [...] It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze” (Marks, 2000: 162). She determines the two perceptual states thus: optical visuality requires a distance and a centre with the viewer, acting like a pinhole camera, whilst the haptic relationship is identified with a desire to connect and interact with another surface. Marks describes this process as a “concomitant loss of depth – we become amoeba like, lacking a centre, changing as the surface to which we cling changes” which changes us through the interaction (Marks, 2002: xvi). This important relationship of both an optical and haptic vision creates a tension and balance that is symbiotic and an integral balance between the push and pull of life (Marks, 2002). The display of the gloves in enclosed boxes adds to the erotic tension, creating a connection that simultaneously reveals and conceals, with an intention never to fully satisfy the viewer (Figure 68 & Figure 69).



Figure 66: Joy Buttriss, *Lacuna*, 2012, Bonington Gallery, Nottingham, image Marko Dutka.



Figure 67: Joy Buttress, *Lacuna*, 2012, Bonington Gallery, Nottingham, Image Debbie Whitmoore.

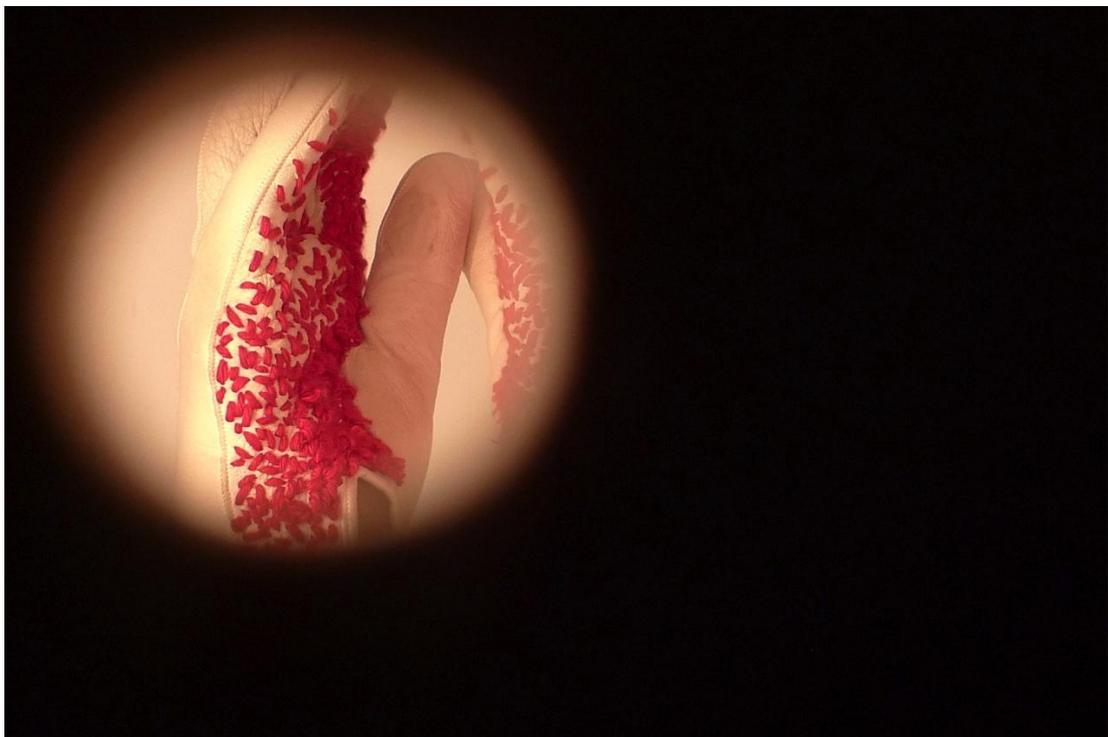


Figure 68: Joy Buttress, *Lacuna* (peephole), 2012, Bonington Gallery, Nottingham.

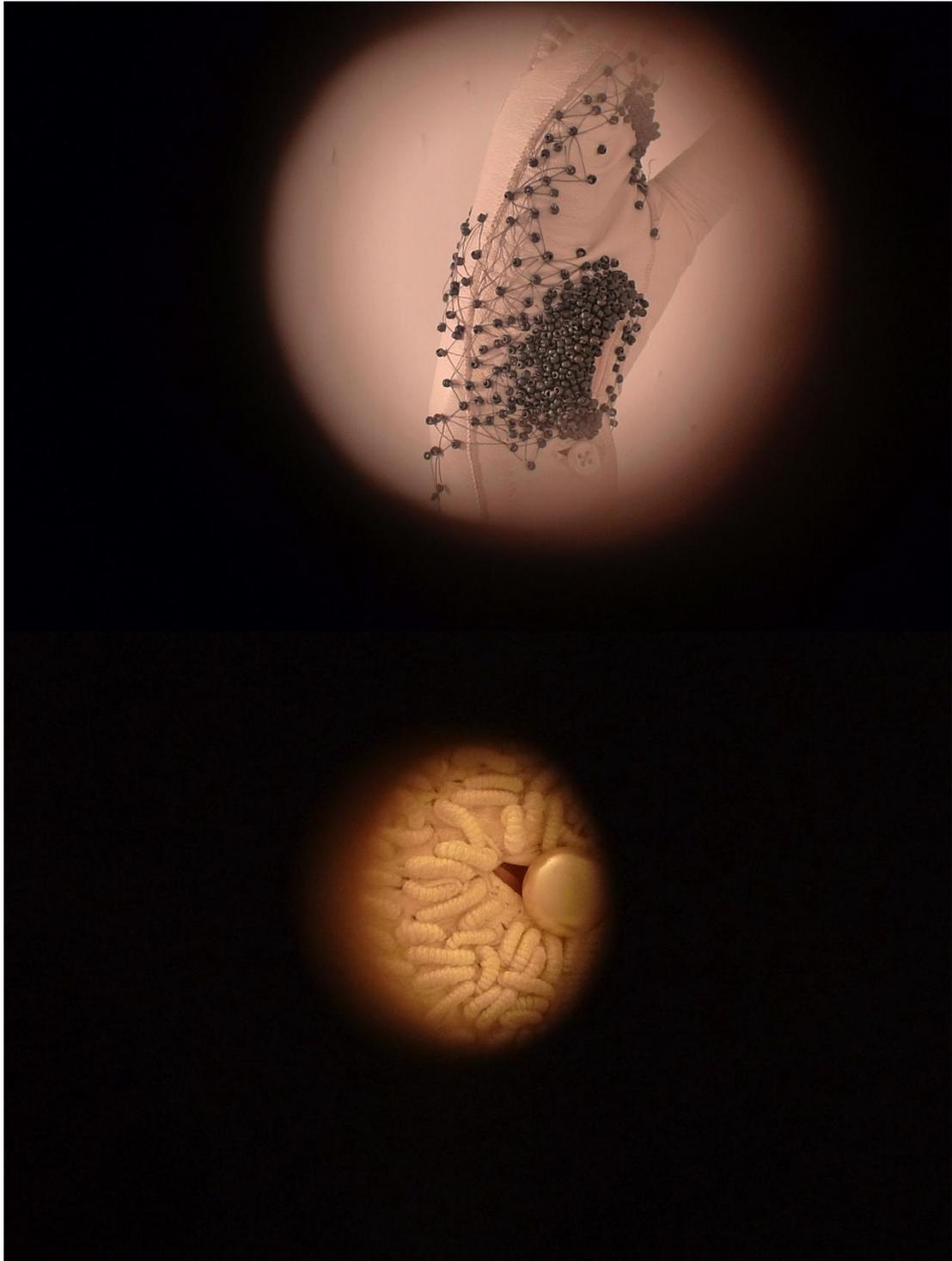


Figure 69: Joy Buttrell, *Lacuna (peephole)*, 2012, Bonington Gallery, Nottingham.

My intention was for the viewer to intimately experience the exhibition, to feel part of my own state of wonder when I lifted that magnifying glass. I also wanted to transform the audience's perception and understanding of what lace can suggest through an intimate and unsettling connection with an object. The presentation of the

artworks embodied the synchronous action of revealing and concealing the skin, alluding to the physical construction of lace and suggesting the action of striptease (see Chapter Two: 47).

The meaning was not about volume or size but intensity and intimate experience, sensually immersing the viewer in microcosms of details and suggestions of lace. The hidden environments were contrasted through the scale and visual presentation of five one-metre square latex wall pieces, spot lit in the darkness and stretched by large hand-forged nails that suggested crucifixion, pain and disquiet. Closer inspection exposed a textural surface of intricate large-scale historical patterns stitched in clear monofilament, distorting and tearing the fabric and evoking the physicality of flayed skin. Through the chosen material of latex a strong suggestion and connection was made to fetishistic practices that sexualise materials through texture and association (see Chapter Two: 52). The execution of the artworks had a confrontational intention to shock but also engage the viewer in a dichotomy of intrigue and repulsion (Figure 70).



Figure 70: Joy Buttriss, *Skin 1* (detail), Lacuna, 2012, Bonington Gallery, Nottingham.

The final artwork, *Skin Quilt*, attempted to cross the boundary of touch by engaging the viewer with a visceral fear of wrapping and entwining the body in a synthetic skin. The quilt was set on a rocking chair and laid in a position to suggest it had recently been used to cover a body. In contrast to the unfamiliar process of the *Skin 1–5* (Figure 61) artworks the *Skin Quilt* (Figure 62) was manifested in the form of a

familiar object that is normally used to add comfort and warmth and which is often placed in the familiar setting of the home. A sinister, unspoken narrative was suggested through simple lighting that created a large foreboding silhouette of the rocking chair on the wall and cast deep shadows in the folds of the fabric. The gaze of the viewer was directed through the lighting to infestations that adorned the surface, forming a texture that was both beautiful and disturbing.

The preplanning of the exhibition was focused on portraying my new understanding of lace and skin and how to express these ideas to my audience that would challenge and provoke. If the gloves had been displayed openly in a clear case the viewer would have been seduced by the decorative qualities of the object rather than engage with the meaning and intention behind the artworks. At the start of the study I had been seduced by the intrinsic beauty of lace and it was not until I took a closer look through my research that I understood the hidden meanings and associations that made me question my original assumption.

Not all of my audience appreciated the way I had displayed my work. I received my first ever letter of complaint from three members of the Nottinghamshire Branch of the Embroiderers Guild. The writer of the letter Maureen Voisey wrote of her 'personal disappointment' at being confronted with a pile of 'tea chests' with holes not big enough to focus on the contents inside (complaint letter, see Appendix 4). It was made clear in the letter that the 'intricate workmanship' they expected to see was only visible on the postcards accompanying the exhibition. This reaction reinforced my decision to take away the ease at which to view the artworks and offer instead a display that needed perseverance and patience to engage with the artworks. The visitors that persevered and participated fully in the process of looking enjoyed the challenge and felt their persistence was rewarded through the revelation of hidden object.

The varied and diverse response to the exhibition highlighted the transformation I had undertaken as an artist, it illustrated a new dialogue that had been created around my work. The exhibition embodied the marriage of art practice and research and a new understanding of ideas and theories that had profoundly impacted my way of working. The emphasis has shifted from a decorative interpretation of ideas to a conceptual research paradigm. This transformation has culminated in a new understanding and appreciation of the metaphysical values of lace which has permeated and enriched my practice.

Conclusion

This practice-led inquiry set out to establish the metaphorical value of lace in contemporary art. It provides a conceptual framework that contributes to an understanding of lace that is relevant and important to artists, curators and museums. Through the literature review, current writing on lace is predominantly placed in a historical and technical context. This thesis situates and distinguishes lace as an important symbolic signifier of issues relating to gender and sexuality. It provides a comprehensive study that places lace and metaphors of lace as a significant precipitant in contemporary art. The thesis also provides the written evidence of this journey and follows the conventions of academic research and methods formally presenting my findings.

My new body of artwork, produced for the exhibition *Lacuna* (2012) at the end of the study, visually articulates my transformation through the change in nature and appearance of my work. My practice has gone from explorations that were ornamental to artworks that express a discernible voice challenging and confronting my audience with notions that are no longer just decorative but offer a visual rhetoric. This study demonstrates the transformation of my art practice through the introduction of academic research methods, theoretical literature and the Nottingham Trent University lace archive. The inquiry establishes a clear focus on creative research. It has used methods of self-reflection through an action research framework combined with my established creative process to provide me with an injection of new knowledge and ways of learning. Action research equipped me with a collection of techniques that complemented my practice but which also challenged my concept formation. Action research also enabled the integration and inclusion of case studies by offering a route to a profound understanding through the practice of others and triggering change in my own way of working. Carole Gray suggests that practice-led research should attempt to integrate and synthesise the best aspects of each area of practice and research to create a simultaneously generative and reflective process (Gray, 1996). This was achieved through multiple methods that included reflective journals, mind maps and sketchbooks (Chapter One: 15), initiating a process of contemplation that instigated ideas and concepts and put reflection as a key tool to challenge my thoughts. The doctoral research process also introduced me to literature that questioned my ideas and opened my thoughts to theories that connected to my areas of interest. This broadened my understanding and initiated alternative thinking that deepened my capacity for learning.

The method of case studies offered me a unique opportunity to understand the thinking of creative practitioners who included themes of lace in their work (Chapter Three: 59). The introduction of case studies in the inquiry contributed to an understanding of the process and formation of concepts in the work of contemporary practitioners and enabled me to question my own intentions as an artist. The case studies were investigated through techniques that combined structured and unstructured interviews, visual mapping and focus groups, achieving a process of evaluation and analysis that offered new insight and furthered my understanding of the use of lace. The five chosen case studies covered a wide variety of current creative practice and clearly showed the diversity of associated themes connected to historical lace fabric.

Two areas of differences became apparent through the case study research. Shane Waltner, Cecilia Heffer and Elaine Bell were excited by the construction and craftsmanship of lace and explored the possibilities to draw from the historical lace to create works that celebrated structure and heritage. Fine artists Catherine Bertola and Danica Maier were inspired by the duality of lace that incorporates heritage and connections with gender related issues of inequality, sexuality and exploitation. The findings in Chapter Three demonstrate how art and design can exploit multiple themes in connection with lace but still transmit ideas that are relevant in a current arena.

The doctoral process has required me to place and substantiate my theories and creative ideas in the context of academic literature, enabling me to develop and progress as both a researcher and artist. Schön describes the “permeable boundary” that can be created through actions that incorporate both researcher and practitioner as an “intertwinement” (Schön 1991: 325). This connecting relationship has become a necessary aspect of my creative process, informing my ideas and shaping my concepts to produce new artwork that expresses the transformative process of academic research and creative practice. Brad Haseman and Daniel Mafe describe in the statement below the importance of understanding the balance of both creative practice and research:

it is when this potent and somewhat unruly discipline is co-joined with research that creative practice-led research becomes truly emergent in its outcomes. (*Haseman and Mafe, 2010: 220*)

It is this deployment of research in my own practice that has prompted a significant change from 'process-led' to 'concept-led' method of working, and in doing so it has created a new visual dialogue in the outcomes of my artworks.

My research initiated the development of a philosophical framework around literature that contributes to a theoretical understanding of lace in the context of clothing. This was achieved through the understanding of fashion cycles and their significant connection with social and cultural changes, in particular the pivotal shift in the mid-twentieth century that established a change in the associations of lace to encompass more than wealth, status and craftsmanship (Chapter Two: 41). I argue that lace fabric offered the fashion designers of the 1960s an appropriate material to reflect the changes in society that allowed women to reveal and display their bodies openly. Lace became a fabric that could be worn as a single layer, exposing the skin and adding a sexual attraction and erotic charge contributing to the sexualisation and objectification of the female form. These ideas are substantiated through literature that establishes the potential for fabric and clothing to offer a sexual power.

Understanding was drawn from the theoretical writings of Entwistle (2000), Entwistle and Wilson (2001), Wolf (1991) and Arnold (2001), amongst others. These ideas have been developed to incorporate the material implications of lace and reference the open-work structure to reveal and conceal the skin. Ideas around the visibility of women through the application of adornment are established, making a connection with the decorative qualities of lace to embellish rather than clothe (Chapter Two: 48). Lace fabric is also positioned as a material that can offer a fetishistic appeal with an ability to excite and induce sexual reaction (Chapter Two: 52).

I establish a notion that the decorative open-work structure of lace reveals the skin by exposing a boundary between our sensory body and the world around us. This distinctive and provocative position creates a relationship with those who observe it and those who wear it, allowing for an intimate and shifting threshold. The significance of this liminal position became particularly apparent through the writings of George Simmel on adornment (Simmel, 1908, In: Frisby and Featherstone, 2000: 208). This text confirmed for me the unique intermediate position that lace can inhabit on the skin and the potential power it has to emanate symbolic meanings associated with seduction through its open-work structure. From these notions I framed new concepts in my practice around lace pattern and the surface of the skin, encompassing themes of beauty and sexuality.

The thesis also situates skin as a metaphor for boundaries both physical and sensual and places it in the context of contemporary art practice. Artists are highlighted who

recreate skin through artificial and natural means to question and subvert its meaning while inducing a discourse surrounding representation and identity. Skin is also demonstrated in my art practice as an interface that engages with the visceral and physical body, creating emotive boundaries through the application of pattern and stitch to adorn and scar the surface. The process of stitch is authenticated as a valuable tool for artists to redefine the social construction of the feminine. This is validated in the text through the practice of artists who transmit socio-cultural ideas and challenge our perception of gender. The interface between skin, historical lace pattern and stitch formed a new body of artwork produced as part of my inquiry that demonstrated a concept that explores and determines the responsive limits created through the body, ornamentation and texture.

The materials leather and latex were chosen for their embedded meaning and emotive boundaries, forming surfaces that allowed for interplay between pattern and skin. Digital technology and hand stitch were used to explore the application of historical lace motifs onto the surface, which contributed to my knowledge of process and understanding of materials. Laser etching and digital embroidery were investigated in distinctive ways through approaches that pushed the boundaries of formal and conventional application. The culmination of these explorations became a body of work that encompassed the implicit qualities of lace and articulated my ideas through visual means.

The exhibition of this body of work became an important part of my process. Early on in the study I had been challenged to reflect on the meaning of my past artworks and my understanding of how they were received by an audience. This challenge provoked me to reconsider the way I approached my work and ultimately how I displayed it. The final exhibition, *Lacuna* (2012), played a crucial role in expressing my intentions both creatively and theoretically in a comprehensive but challenging way by allowing me to engage with the audience on a new level.

The exhibition was more than a room to display artworks; it embodied the theories established through the inquiry and offered a sensuous experience that penetrated and connected the viewer through emotive and visceral subject matters. The decision to add peepholes in the boxes had the intention to restrict the view and also create a dimension with the observer that suggested a sexual encounter. This drew on theories conceived in the study that made reference to the revealing and concealing of the body and the inducible intimate display that precipitates erotic desire (Entwistle, 2000; Arnold, 1999; Barthes, 1973; Steele, 1996; and Marks, 2002). The viewing experience did not offer a purely decorative encounter. Instead

the artworks were difficult to see and it took perseverance from the observer, creating an abstraction and frustration that was not welcomed by everyone. The experience entwined emotional states and reactions with processes and materials that aroused both positive and negative experiences offering a challenging and new engagement with my artwork. The exhibition embodied both my theoretical and visual understanding of lace and provided a platform to connect with themes and ideas that demonstrated the metaphorical value of lace as well as the decorative.

As I conclude this thesis and reflect on the study, it is clear that there has been a significant transformation in my artistic practice. The combination of both my thesis and a new body of artwork clearly demonstrates the change brought about through research methods and an introduction to theoretical literature in the formation of ideas and concepts that I have articulated both through the thesis and the artworks. The methodology of action research has introduced to my practice self-reflective activities that have challenged and exposed my thought process, while drawing from my already-formed tacit knowledge, to provide a study that is inclusive and relevant to my way of working. Complex theoretical understanding has been introduced through literature that challenges my way of thinking and has led to a body of artwork that pursues a deeper question of female sexualisation and objectification, which challenges and questions the associations of lace. I have also embraced new processes of manufacture through digital technology that pursue the decorative and aesthetic nature of lace.

Practice-led research has transformed me as an artist. It has opened my practice to new ways of thinking, looking and understanding. It has combined my knowledge gained through doctoral research with my process of concept development and created a new path of study that is evidenced through the artworks I have produced. The emergence of new thought processes that question my creative practice has transformed the boundaries between my artworks and audience, establishing a new creative discourse that has brought about a voice of my own. The legacy of this inquiry in my practice is evident in a new body of work recently produced and shown as part of the *Lace Works: contemporary art and Nottingham Lace* exhibition at Nottingham Castle Gallery (November 2012 – February 2013). The exhibition highlighted the work of contemporary artists whose work reveals a continuing fascination in lace that goes beyond traditional definitions and associations. It included work from the artists Lucy Brown, Nicola Donovan, Cal Lane, Teresa Whitfield and Timorous Beasties, and it featured new work and highlighted items from the Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery's historic lace collection.

Through the use of seven vintage French peasants' undergarments my work, entitled *Worn* (2012) (Figure 71 & Figure 72), explored the disparity between women's class, status and wealth. The clothing was chosen to embody and represent the toil and hardship of labour while bearing the memories and physical traces of the women who wore them. The work aimed to challenge the viewer to search for the unseen and concealed interventions on the inner surface that made reference to intimacy, secrecy and suppression of the women who wore lace and the women who made it. Historical lace motifs were taken from the Nottingham Trent University Lace Archive and recreated through digital and hand stitch with the intention to suggest beauty, fragility and sexuality. The interiors of the garments were beautified with stitch, gold foil, waxed flowers and beadwork that could only be seen when the viewer looked up under the clothing or peered inside (Figure 73, Figure 74, Figure 75, Figure 76, & Figure 77). Binoculars were provided to aid the viewer's quest to take a closer look, but this still inhibited the ability to view the garment as a whole by adding to the restricted and controlled access of the art pieces. These new artworks demonstrated the impact of my practice-led research by virtue of the continued application of theoretical ideas developed by way of the inquiry and through the execution and display of the artworks to challenge and engage my audience in new ways.

Reflective methods have become embedded in my practice and now play a central role in how I think and develop concepts. New understanding brought about by the introduction of academic literature has profoundly influenced my practice providing me with new knowledge and comprehension of ideas and theories. The outcomes of this inquiry establish the themes and associations held within the premise of lace and the relevance they have in the context of contemporary art. The thesis has provided a repository that can be built on and developed by other artists and researchers. The metaphorical value of lace has been positioned in this study as a pertinent and effective tool to communicate multifarious themes and associations. The inquiry describes the relevance of practice-led research in the context of current creative practice. It addresses the concerns of two communities contributing not only to the academic study and theoretical understanding of lace but also (and as importantly) to the creative process and work of the visual artist in contemporary art practice.



Figure 71: Joy Butress, *Worn, Lace Works* (2012), Nottingham Castle.



Figure 72: Joy Buttress, *Worn (Bloomers)* (2012), Lace Works Exhibition, Nottingham Castle.



Figure 73: *Worn*, (inside bloomers detail), Joy Buttress, Lace Works Exhibition, Nottingham Castle (2012)



Figure 74: Joy Buttress, *Worn* (inside dress detail), (2012), Lace Works Exhibition, Nottingham Castle.



Figure 75: Joy Buttress, *Worn* (inside dress detail), 2012, Lace Works Exhibition, Nottingham, images Debbie Whitmoore.



Figure 76: Joy Buttress, *Worn* (inside dress detail), 2012, Lace Works Exhibition, Nottingham.



Figure 77: Joy Buttress, *Worn* (outside dress detail), Lace Works Exhibition, Nottingham, images Debbie Whitmoore.

Appendices

Appendix One: Case Study – questions for first interview

First Interview 05/03/2010

Artist: Danica Maier (studio) Lincoln 1.30pm

Examples of artworks with themes of lace:

Crown and Feathers (2004),

Horizontal Rumba (2004-05),

The Parting of the Red Sea (2004).

Intraducible (2005)

1. Why did you use lace as an influence in this piece of work?
2. What associations does lace have for you as an artist?
3. Has lace played a significant role in your art?
4. Would you use lace as a concept again in your art and why?
5. Why do you think there has been a resurgence of lace in art and design?

Appendix Two: Case Study – questions for second interview

Second Interview 21/01/11

Artist: Danica Maier (studio) Lincoln 3pm

1. Associations of material - the audience 'They see and have the expectation that lace is pretty, feminine, lovely, safe and domestic.' Why do you think the audience has that expectation?

'The black lace tends to be for the sexualisation of women something sexy but I am not particularly interested in that side. It is more about the nice side the lace collar, the little ruffled pants that girls wear and the cute, pretty and lovely, and going back to the hand made something that is women's work for women to do.'

2. Could you tell me more about the themes and associations' lace plays in your work.

'its not so much the lace, its the associations with lace, so it is with all my work it is the associations'

3. Could you tell me more about the use of pornography in your work?

4. Do you make connections with lace and pornography?

5. Could you also explain the balance that I see happening in your work between pattern and sex.

6. Would you say that your work has the ambiguity that lace has?

7. When you think of lace what words come into your head?

Appendix Three: Danica Maier Interview

Danica Maier

Interview 2 - 21/01/11 at her studio in Lincoln

The first part of the interview starts with Danica visually mapping her practice through the images she has chosen. The conversation turns to artist Karla Black and her work with objects.

D: She uses a lot of objects that are connected to women, like make up, Vaseline, creams and stuff like that and she's quiet interesting in the way that she talks about it in terms of this questioning of feminism. I suppose it is putting it on the side of is there really feminism and women's issues involved with these objects or is it just that because of the way that I was raised. These are what I was surrounded by and therefore these are things that I am interested in so therefore I use them but is it really about being a woman or is it about being really interested in these objects. Which I have always thought and had this frustration with and I always love the way she always talks about it, because I think there is err..... When I was doing my practice tutors would come to me and say oh look you are doing stitching and you're a girl, it must be all feminist issues, yes of course that comes into it but it is other things as well. I just thought nobody ever goes and looks at Richard Serra's work and says look, oh it's a big bit of steel, it must be to do with male issues because of the materials you are using. It just always seems that's a given so therefore pass that to other issues. But with women you cant, it's this thing you hit first off. So I think that is quiet interesting, really interesting. (Danica goes to look for a book on Karla Black)

Danica starts to talk about the contents of the book and Karla Blacks work on handbags.

D: Actually when handbags were originally curated they were independence for women because before that they couldn't have pockets in their outfits so they always

had to go out with a man because they didn't have any place to hold money or keys. So they had to go out with a man until they had a handbag and then you think where handbags have come now so its this kind of original feminist object and actually now its quite differently seen. Danica continues to look for book in another part of the room but is not able to locate it, so returns to the table.

D: So I suppose there is that, which is a strong starting point, I am not sure how they are all going to connect yet. I suppose there are things like the making. (Danica starts to move images around to create a visual map of her practice, drawing lines between images connecting them)

D: Visual map. The groups feed into each other – with the act of making is really important to me, this is what I need to do the making. That's why the Summer Lodge (NTU Fine Art residency) is a really important part of what we do its about spending time making and looking at the making. Thinking through making. Danica goes back to the map and groups images into a thinking area).

D: It goes back to family and a particular kind of background where the women were taught to do these things and having a real interest in the love of making. I have always sat round making something but not just been satisfied with the making at the end of it and having something neat to put on your table, or fill your house full of junk. It's connecting the thinking and suppose that is the crucial thing in my practice, I suppose its taking things that are quite typical of everyone and everyone can connect into but taking it beyond it and questioning it. The making as well as the things I am looking at as well. So within that the things that I am interested in obviously women's issues, subversive subversion, questioning, always a thing about questioning.

Questioning is actually quite important I've never quite thought about it. Hyper-real, unreal and looking at that with authenticity being important but also questioning between those two things. I suppose there the thing about the creation something connecting back to these groups (goes back to the visual map). Simulation of an

idealized view of looking back to the nostalgia of my childhood and even not just my own childhood but of what they were teaching me about which was their own kind of up bringing, I think those are a kind of constant shuffling back that way which comes into it. So then that comes out to others peoples practice, looking at them for ideas and inspiration, these are people I put in a context of what I do because they are working in similar but different ways. So someone like Claire, who is looking a folk, traditional, American connecting that with quilting for painting so that subtle shift of taking something that a quilting pattern and putting it and painting on wood and how that changes a women's understanding a perception of it and it also questions the original element to begin with.

J: So you almost feel that all the groups feed into each other?

D: Yes,

D: That the making to go back to it, you look at that then you look at Laura Owens paintings and it's that I just love. If you look at the shift, the development of it of the surface of these they look like embroidery or icing work because some it is right directly on the surface, absolutely lovely but its also like embroidery, beautiful and gorgeous. So I suppose those are the kind of Then you have 'the other' [Danica links up the pornography and writes on it 'The Other'] and then I suppose there is the norm and maybe that's where that fits in. That bouncing off between each other and sort of I suppose it not necessarily a criticism of that or a criticism of that. It's a kind of questioning of both and an interesting looking beyond to be able to question to think why do we just follow certain rules, why do we just go with it. I think within the materials I use. It is the association one has with it, which is why I use them. Its safe, its comfortable, besides just the women's issues, it is that everybody can be kind of drawn to it in a kind of particular way, that usually seen as lovely or in a traditional sense one may not think that they can least see it or like it because it is super traditionally lovely. Than having an encounter with something that is not expected

within there, hopefully then starts to question both sides of it. It is no longer maybe lovely but then also why is that and why does one have those associations with sex as well. This is something at the moment that is changing quiet a lot in my practice my interest I think and I don't really know where it is going to go, which is a bit of a scary thing.

J: What I might do is introduce the questions while we are talking about this. Yes, I wanted to talk about the pornography side.

D: Yes the pornography side, it was never about pornography it was about sex,

J: Right ok that's....

D: Pornography is where I can get imagery of sex,

J: Right

D: It has also come from my own personal interest in sex, and maybe even pornography as well that's been there from an early stage.

J: But you say that there's two different things, pornography and sex.

D: Yes, I think the issue about pornography is a very large one and it was something that originally did to start looking and researching into but got a little bit bogged down with it and actually realized it's not really pornography that I am interested in, it's sex. But that particular thing and I suppose it's a kind of natural interest in something that was very taboo in the realm I grew up in. I know it's not for everybody and I know and I am kind of interested in that too and I am interested in it in my own practice and how people see and perceive as well. So I knew not everybody would think of sex as a kind of taboo subject or something that has a kind of heightened resonance of something that counters the loveliness because people are raised differently. In a kind of suburban middle class Christian upbringing its there and I kind of found it interesting how actually with out it there is no family, but yet in the family you don't have to talk about it and its not celebrated but then you have a natural desire and

drive that's going on, so was always something of real interest to me. Beyond being interested in sex in a physical way, but it is interesting that is completely changing now. It might be because I have had a baby or it might just sex has changed and I no longer find it... it doesn't have that heightened taboo anymore; it's kind of that's gone. I don't feel that there is anybody telling me not to be doing it, or that it's naughty or any of those things anymore. So it is quite interesting that it is changing in the practice. I am not quite sure what's going to happen then so it's a bit weird. Sorry, it's quiet interesting it feel like it has been a big part of it, it's sort of the counter between the two but it's what is that counter, what is it, so it quite interesting, where things are going to go. Yes, so sorry.

J: You did touch on, about the audience, the people who come and see the work and about that luring them in with beautiful and decorative and then subverting that, could you talk a bit more about that?

D: I mean I suppose on the first realm is the seduction, seducing someone in, getting people to come, what is it you attract more bees with honey. So kind of pulling them in that way and then through observation, through really looking something more is revealed to the viewer. I am quite interested in that relationship between looking at work and seeing work, I suppose, and that takes a bit of time and investment in order to possibly see all the realms with what's going on in my practice. But I am also interested in that for some people its immediate and there isn't any thing and they think what is the big deal it isn't so obvious blah blah blah, but as an audience and as one organism, I am quite interested in how there is those differences and that kind of talks about a larger thing within societies is that we do see differently we approach things differently and I think it about perception and understanding as well. It is quite interesting how we only see things we know and we understand through experience, so there is actually, unless you have had a an experience or you've seen or know what you are looking at you can't see it. So when they're the side of people who

might think oh well actually it's their own, they are filling in a lot of blanks that aren't actually there. So it is only if you can see it that you say it.

[Danica leads me into a different room and shows me an artwork that is a pixelated through her technique of stitch and depicts an explicit image.]

Danica: I love doing that – the act of making and sewing, and I suppose there is part to the work that I've always thought about as a performing element. Not that it's ever seen, but in the action of making that and doing it, you've made that wanting to be the fifties housewife, but also not wanting to capture something but knowing that's not real, that it never existed this sort of ideal that we have been sold. Kind of wanting it, but knowing that it never did, so it's kind of creating the sense of creating an antithesis to it, so if I am kind of countering it and questioning it creates it to be more real because that's how you create something. If you create something so there is that going on behind it. Yes, so the audience, I am quite interested in how, and it's in all the stuff that I've made and different strands of my practice there is element of where you stand in relation to the work and where you move and where you physically have a relationship with the work that it changes how you see and understand it. So it either like with the lace installation the pieces moving around so you then end up in a position where the anamorphic images that are projected then pops it into place and then you see it otherwise it just looks like stretched out weird things if you ever see anything. Those embroidery pieces is about moving away from them then it pops in and the drawings it's the opposite, so it's going into it, so from a distance they just look very beautiful.

J: Is it important about drawing in or pulling away?

D: Well...

J: Is that significant it's just about

D: No, I hadn't really, no I think maybe more, no I wouldn't really say the drawing pushing away. It is more that there is an act of moving of seeing or maybe just a subtle thing, just that little thing of expectations of what you think you are seeing has been shifted and hopefully that experience that a viewer would have then they might take that to other things in normal life, you know that they didn't maybe, hopefully shifts there, maybe they don't take things for granted so much anymore, but they have a little bit of questioning.

J: We have talked a little bit about this as well about that balance between pattern and sex, can you talk a little bit more about that using pattern to express sex?

D: What do you mean?

J: For example, you... its similar to what we were talking about before with drawing people in when you have used the Laura Ashley print, something that is very familiar, where that's not a familiar pattern some of your work is about pattern isn't it?

D: About an actual pattern. I think that's, I suppose more particularly, I suppose the Laura Ashley, that's the stuff I use for the drawings, so it creating a base, the ones that go pattern that way [points to an image] it all in the drawing or its even using it straight from it, or it moves around as a twist or I've slightly manipulated something from various bits and bobs. I suppose its just being the first thing is using a language that is already established. So it's that sense of we all understand what Laura Ashley is and what it means, and who it's for and what they represent. I am not critical of that I am kind of interested in it, and then again countering it with what the words are, but also with those works drawing work is where I am becoming interested. This sort of formal thing, but I am very interested in terms of print and an image and how it is created and how much information you can remove and how much information you can keep that makes it still readable and understandable as a flower or something else or even decorative so there is kind of formal things that I am playing with that. Some of the drawings where you look there's actually very little information, this

comes from as well I suppose this comes from my background in screen printing and understanding about building up an image through three or more colours, or even just one colour or how you do that. How you compose and bring together a complex image very simply, but also how you can manipulate change and still have something that is tangible. I also like the Laura Ashley piece that is just a little corner of something I blew up and twisted round so it was the same exact base that was drawn four times, but each one was done completely differently. So in some there was different information that was left and revealed. I suppose as well there is something to about the act of making them and looking at a particular pattern, that's an exploration for me of really getting and having an intimate experience with it, I suppose. By making decisions about what stays and what's removed and how to do it, I am becoming very very familiar with it, with that side, I am not quite sure what that does.

J: You talked about language that is already established and I just wanted to start thinking about that and that association of material. You talked in your last interview about lace and that language, that established language and you talked about – quote “*black lace tends to be for the sexualisation of women something sexy, I am not particular interested in that side, its more about the nice side the lace collar the little ruffled pants that girls wear the cute, pretty lovely, and going back to the handmade something that is women's work for women to do.*”

Could you tell me more about those themes and associations that lace plays in your work? When you talk about lace and when you use lace in your work and what it's about, you say is when you're talking about the 'nice side'.

D: The proper side, propriety it was very much about propriety and being proper and lace is proper, I am trying to think of more to say ...

J: Is that your association when you think of lace, is that what you think of?

D: Yes, I mean the lace work I will start with this then maybe we will go on. It came from a collection of lace I got from my grandmother, so I inherited this collection of lace, it was all either little bits for trimming that were left over or they were cut off from the bottom of a slip. They had the little bit of silk with them as well, keeping the lace bits on and obviously to be saved and used as well for future garments. But it was done in the white side of it, the nice side, the proper side. So it started with that.

J: So you think that's what you base your association on is that family history?

D: Family history I suppose, it's interesting because I have complete dislike for the black lace underwear stuff, I really don't like it, this sort of sexy, which is meant to be sexy. I don't find it that way I find it crude, I suppose I have very crude associations with it in terms of I suppose prostitution maybe, because it's a stereotype of what is meant to be sexualized, therefore I don't really find that interesting.

J: So you don't associate the lace with pornography when you're doing your work?

D: No, I see it more as a counter to it, I think because of the lace ribbon I use is particular and in a particular colour and are all very light pastel colours. All my laces are up there on the top there [Danica points to the shelf] there is actually a dark blue, I really have not used many of the dark colours but since the very beginning they are all pastel and purple might be the darkest.

J: So you just associate sex with black lace rather than white?

D: Yes

D: Although underwear does come in white [laughs] I have some on top of my bra at the moment but it's not what I am thinking about when I am doing it.

J: Do you think it's because it is associated with memories and family memories that you don't associate it as sexual, even though.....?

D: It's not just family members, its associating it with home and a more generic issues of family so you're getting things like lace curtains, you get things like lace doilies you get the lace the things that go on the back of chairs, and I had these and I loved the ruffles on the bottom of my knickers... as a little girl I was so sad when I couldn't wear them any more, I was so sad my sister was and I was too big. So it is all about that side of lace, that when I am using it, I am particularly interested in that which is why I think I use a particular types and particular colours because its not about just making something that has a an immediate association to something sexy or raunchy and the imagery is raunchy, it really is about the balancing of two things. I notice in my life it's really interesting that there is this juxtaposing of what seems to be a stereotype or typical thing, that counters what your expectation is, then anything that I find in life that does that I am really excited by people that do it or objects that do it, televisions, anything that has this, you think it's going to be this when actually it's that.

J: Lace does, it has that ambiguity and that's what one of my points was about that...

D: That's true, yes

J: ...that your work has an ambiguity like lace, doesn't it? It has that sort of, it can mean many different things to different people and what your saying is an absolute example of that. You're associating lace with something that is sweet and pretty and not sexy.

D: Yes [laughs]

It's not, it's on your Easter dress for children.

J: Is that cultural?

D: Maybe, but I don't think it's not cultural to England either; I think it's very English, I do see lace, the lace curtains the lace doilies the sort of Miss Marple-esque type little old lady. I think people have very hideous associations with lace because that's what

they associated it with, like old ladies, they don't necessarily think it's lovely and beautiful but they think it's meant to be seen as something nice and pretty. I am kind of quite interested in people also coming in and saying, oh God it's a bunch of lace, but because they are having that counter association to what I am completely playing with and then they might actually enjoy that there is something else going on there. But then I am hoping that also counters the associations they have with the lace. Sort of switching it back on itself so it changes their expectations and thinking. So they say well things don't actually have to be, just because something is straight so to speak, doesn't mean it is not interesting any more. Because I think there is something quite interesting in our culture now where anything is acceptable and things are ok when actually it's not ok to be very normal to the point of extremely normal, because everybody has a tattoo and everybody has piecing, so that and they all think they are being outrageous they are not they are all being exactly the same.

[Laughs]

J: It's sad,

D: It is sad, but not questioning, it goes back to the lack of questioning, and lack of just thinking.

J: Questioning is important

D: It is really important it's this lack of.....

J: it keeps popping up again this lack of questioning.

D: Yes it does, Why are you doing that, why are you going out and getting a tattoo like all your friends, why are you doing a piercing, why are you all dressing nice, why?

J: And if you could think of words that come into your head that sum up lace, just single words what would you say?

D: Propriety, doily, sickly sweet if that can be one word, old fashioned, nostalgic, twee, hideous I think as well, I kind of hate it too. [Laughs]

J: The association of material and audience, something that you said before, quote: “they see and have the expectation that lace is pretty, feminine, lovely, safe and domestic.” Why do you think the audience has that expectation?

D: Why do they have that? Because it is cultural, because of the role that lace plays in our lives what it is does what it is, where traditionally it was seen and where they have seen it. It’s part of the language that is already out there.

J: Sort of the everyday?

D: Yes, or even that it’s not everyday, it kind of is isn’t it?

J: Not any more.

D: Not anymore, so that’s why there I think there is these kind of odd associations that are nostalgic or granny or old fashioned that embeds some sort of old, seemingly old fashioned propriety which is completely artificial because people don’t really act any differently than they used to. We haven’t gone on and invented all these things that we get up to these days, they have always been there.

[Interview finished.]

Appendix Four: Letter of Complaint

1st March 2012.

~~[Redacted]~~
Lenton Gdns.
Nottingham NG7 2EA.

Dear Joy

3 members of Nottinghamshire Branch of the Embroiderers' Guild met on Tuesday morning 28th Feb, in eager anticipation of seeing your exhibition in the Bonington Building.

Our programmes' Secretary had picked up a 'flier' for your exhibition, which, from the illustration of the decorated glove looked very interesting.

Personally, I was disappointed to be confronted by piles of 'tea chests' - a truly contrasting technique to the exquisite work on the gloves inside. With wearing glasses - a necessity at my age - the peep holes were just not big enough to focus on the boxes' contents.

How much more enjoyable it would have been if the boxes had been made of perspex in order to actually see the gloves and the intricate workmanship shown on the cards left out on the table.

The showcase containing the sheets of inspiration was a worthy display, & I personally would have liked your gloves to have been in a similar display case.

I wasn't sure about the 4 sheets of latex, but perhaps that is 'an age thing'. However, the silk buttoned, beaded & machine patterned patchwork quilt was interesting.

Northampton N4 2EA

I do hope my comments will be of help, as
it was so disappointing not to be able
to see your work.

Yours Sincerely

Maureen Voisey

Appendix Five: Futurescan – Mapping the Territory Conference Paper (2009)

A Taxonomy of Pattern Through the Analysis of Nottingham Lace

Amanda Briggs-Goode and Joy Buttress

The Nottingham Trent University

Key words: Lace, Pattern, Heritage, Visual Analysis

The Nottingham Trent University holds a collection of Nottingham Lace, which was originally donated to the university between the 1880's and the 1940s. This collection therefore charts the rise and demise of the Nottingham Lace Industry a major contributor to lace manufacture within a global context. An AHRC award has recently enabled the researchers to look at the collection afresh and question its value and benefit to design and educational contexts in the 21st century. This has led to novel ways of developing a visual database which focuses upon design led terminology and a 'visual' language rather than historical or process based search terms. We have also, through other collaborative research projects, developed a relationship with the Natural History Museum where the researchers are engaged with the describing a taxonomy of pattern through the study of the lace collection. By using the context of taxonomy, understanding pattern and primary textile design qualities of repeat, scale, line quality, image qualities and texture it becomes evident that lace presents particular challenges in relation to this analysis as it also combines pattern, texture, holes and depth creating a matrix of complex relationships. This approach is about placing design thinking at the centre of the analysis enabling designers to use the system in ways that are intuitive and focused around the visual elements. This research has engaged with demonstrating how our national heritage can inform our design understanding and aid future art and design practice.

Background

The Nottingham Trent University Lace Collection resulted from bequests to the former Nottingham School of Art & Design by local companies and the Nottingham Lace Federation. Donations were made from the late-19th up to the mid-20th Century. The Collection holds 75,000 items of lace, as single pieces, as items in manufacturers sample books, as portfolios of machine-made and hand-made lace,

and collections of prize-winning examples from international lace competitions. The Collection also includes books on lace history and teaching aids used throughout the Collection's life, providing a rich resource for studying the technical and aesthetic parameters and achievements of lace design and manufacturing.

The collection is known to be noteworthy in two particular respects: it was originally intended as a teaching aid, set up in the hey-day of the establishment of the metropolitan Schools of Design during the Victorian era. The Nottingham School of Art & Design was one of the earliest such schools, established in 1843 to ensure the region was provided with skilled workers, designers and managers to contribute to the economic vitality of the region. The Collection's growth, and its continued use, gives a unique opportunity to scrutinise technical proficiency and innovation within a specific commodity sector, in the context of the history of design education and teaching practice.

The Collection also catalogues the rapid development of machine-made lace, building on regional expertise in hand techniques. The Collection inherently mirrors the technical drivers to replicate better solutions to realise complexity and delicacy.

The industry at its height employed around 25,000 people, but the remnants of precision engineering and the hosiery industry still have a significant presence within the current industrial context and workforce. The level of activity and the quality of designs produced meant that this region was significant in national and international markets. The other regional collection was established with a different agenda to the NTU Collection. The City Council collection of the Museum of Costume and Textiles includes a holding of 23,000 items, which includes sample books with up to 1000 lace items. Their collection includes a broader variety of items, was expanded considerably during the 1960's, but has been closed since September 2003.

The challenge now is how to capture and re-apply the learning embodied in the collection to new contexts. The cataloguing and creation of new ways to access the Collection gives us potential to build new educational and cultural opportunities on the basis of the collecting of the past.

The NTU Lace Collection is housed in a newly equipped room with specialist facilities. The Collection is housed in archival boxes on purpose-built storage shelving in a room dedicated to the collection.

Significant recent work drawing on the Collection was Brompton's 2002 PhD. Her work on material culture determined the metaphorical and social importance of lace to mid-Victorian middle class society, from the evidence of references to lace 'in novel's, women magazines, advice books and in personal letters' (1).

Moving forward

The Lace Collection is also an important part of our work with undergraduate students. Their access to the Collection is tightly controlled, but we are keen to embed this unique resource more firmly as a unique aspect of expert design provision. Third year textile students used the collection as 'visual inspiration' for a competition with Timorous Beasties in 2007. More regular use of the collection continues to be made by our students, and others, as an aspect of image and pattern research for design collections.

We secured AHRC funding in 2007/2008 for collections based in University contexts its main aims was to

- To improve the stewardship of the Nottingham Trent University Lace Collection in a variety of ways, to enable increased access and evaluation of the collection as a stimulus for future research collaborations and innovation in teaching and learning strategies.
- To develop the cataloguing of the collection, by extending the documentation of collection record and facilitating easier access to the collection, including an assessment of possible levels of future web accessibility.
- To develop a coding schema that supports searching by subject interest. By subject interest, we are referring to the visual quality supported by the technology, repeating structures, the interpretation of hand effects and other aesthetic properties.

Essentially even within a hub of regional expertise such as the East Midlands there is very little expertise related to specific knowledge of lace processes or technical skills evident. The people who hold such knowledge generally have an historical focus. The way in which we have approached the collection is to enable searching around historic and process led search tools but also to ensure that the collection could be analysed via a design focused approach and to consider a coding schema and search tools that will enable design led searching.

Therefore there are tools that enable searching on:

- Machine/technology
- Process
- Period or date
- Fabric types
- Object type
- Manufacturer

However, we also began to consider how we could classify different aspects of motif and pattern using a classification of imagery and visual qualities. We therefore also produced search fields which relate to:

- Theme
- Classification
- Construction
- Ethnicity
- Motif
- Period
- Repeat
- Technique

However, while these headings related clearly to visual imagery and it related more directly to printed imagery and had very little relationship with the lace itself. This required more engagement with the visual qualities inherent in lace such as holes and looping or moving threads. More visual analysis was required to enable us to explore these specific visual qualities.

This will lead to the creation of a database that offers a full analytical potential of the collection exploiting as much of the visual language as possible. The database has the capability to offer a rich resource that can be accessed by a wide audience of students, artists, and designers. The re-conceptualisation of lace through the use of archives has become a significant presence in the world of art and design using lace motifs as inspiration. 'Lace in Translation' (2009) is an exhibition at The Philadelphia Design Center (TDC) in the United States. TDC has commissioned three internationally renowned artists and designers whose works are often inspired by traditional lace imagery - Cal Lane, Tord Boontje and Demakersvan. The artists have drawn inspiration from the historic Quaker Lace Company archives to produce site-specific sculptures that explore the intersection of luxurious hand-craftsmanship with modern, mass production. Internationally acclaimed architects Caruso St John has used lace motifs taken from the Nottingham Museums lace archive to create textured

lace concrete wall panels. The reconstructed stone cladding is being manufactured at the new centre for contemporary arts 'Nottingham Contemporary' in the old Lace Market, Nottingham. Reinterpretation of lace motifs has become more evident in current fashion design, interior design and textile art.

Lace and Applications

An example of this reinterpretation is American textile artist Ann Wilson who creates work that evolves in a 'conceptual space' where 'ideas encounter the material processes of handwork and industry' (Wilson 2001). Her investigation of 'networks' through, thread, lace, hair, pins and wire are often performed through animation and installation. Wilson challenges our perceptions of craft and process. Love Jonsson writes in 'NeoCraft: modernity and the crafts' that we should rethink our views on the craft process and digital mediums. Traditional craft and new technology can lead to subversions that could create new symbolical values. This could then influence and alter our perception to understand that craft and industry are 'not antithetical to one other, nor mutually exclusive' (Alfoldy, 2007). Glaswegian design company Timorous Beasties has teamed up with traditional Nottingham lace manufacturer; Morton, Young and Borland (Kilmarnock, Scotland) to produce traditional Nottingham lace patterned curtains. One of the curtains named 'Devil damask' challenges our understanding of the way that we see patterns in lace.

London based textile artist Rebecca Earley has developed the 'heat program' technique that reflects light back to its source. Lace and pins have been used by her to create ghost like images on fabric that reference the transparent qualities of lace. Karen Livingstone in her essay for 'The persistence of Craft' (Greenhalgh, 2002) views the application of new technologies, combined with or informed by traditional techniques as 'some of the most creative and forward looking work' in contemporary textiles. The possibilities opened up by the use of technical textiles and digital processes have also created new challenges and opportunities for textile art (Livingstone, 2002).

Lace has also been reinterpreted in current fashion design, exploiting the historical association with nobility and wealth. Haute couture houses Prada, Christian Lacroix, Valentino and Chanel all graced the catwalks with contemporary lace garments in the autumn/winter 2008/09/10 collections. Lace is once again being used as a way of decoration and adornment for current fashion collections.

Craft techniques are becoming more visible in fashion, design and interior design. The reinterpretations of these craft techniques have also been acknowledged in

recent exhibitions. The 2007 exhibition 'The Radical Lace and Subversive Stitch' at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, brought together twenty seven artists who retranslated traditional techniques challenging the viewer to reconsider their approach to textiles. The Victoria and Albert Museum in 2008 hosted and curated an exhibition - 'Out of the Ordinary: spectacular craft', the show brought together a group of international artists that use craft to transform the everyday. 'The Face of Lace' an exhibition of contemporary art, fashion and design spread across the entire city of Bruges (November 2008 to March 2009). The exhibition aimed to dissolve the boundaries between the disciplines creating an interdisciplinary celebration of lace.

Research and development of the database

Another research council funded project has led to the further study is that of the AHRC/EPSRC funded 'Understanding Complex Structures: Lace and Natural Objects' a project initiated by Professor Tom Fisher and Haida Lang from Nottingham Trent University. This enabled us to meet with various potential partners but in particular The Natural History Museum who work with the classification and analysis of both complex structures and also make distinctions between objects with very small differences between them. This appeared to be a clear parallel with our own scenario – about how you begin to describe a classification system around complex objects. We made a link with Diatom specialist Dr Eileen Cox and we have begun to discuss our collection with her to enable us to utilize her knowledge and make comparison with her classification of intricately patterned objects. Diatoms are a large and ecologically important group of unicellular or colonial algae. They are characterised by their perforated outer shell that is almost lace-like in quality. There are about 200,000 in total of which most have yet to be described or named (Mann and Droop, 1996). The taxonomy of Diatoms is based on the shape and structure of the cell walls. The valve face of the diatom frustules is ornamented with pores (areolae), processes, spines, hyaline areas and other distinguishing features. It is these skeletal features that are used to classify and describe diatoms. The classification system developed by Simonsen (1979) and further developed by Round et al. (1990) is currently the most commonly accepted. The diatoms are divided into two main groups the centric diatom and the pennate diatom; types of symmetry for example unipolar and bipolar symmetry subdivide the groups creating a hierarchical grid.

A visual translation of lace to relate it to the thinking process of an artist /designer is what is sought, defining not only the pattern but also the space in between and the threading through. Creative vision encompasses more than the decoding of pattern it

has an intuitive response to shape and structure. This was explained by Modernist designer George Nelson in his book 'How to See' (1977)

'The language of vision uses light, shape, colour, texture, lines, pattern, similarities, contrasts, movement.' Nelson (1977)

New technology in digital media now offers new thought and fluidity in the process of classification and understanding and exploring of imagery. Retrievr

(www.labs.systemone.at/retrievr) is an experimental service that lets you search and explore in a selection of Flickr images by drawing a rough sketch. Click2touch

(www.click2touch.com) is a site developed by a NTU Masters graduate Nicola Davis, the site offers solutions to understanding fabrics online by mimicking fabrics response to touch.

Oskope (<http://oskope.com>) enables you to search for images on a range of sites and decide how it might be best for you to view and organize them – in a pile, in a grid or on a graph. Touch Graph (www.touchgraph.com) creates mind map graphs through a search engine. Selection of a subject or author produces a graph that visually displays connections of relating results allowing the viewer to navigate and analyse the relevance of the data found. These sorts of applications and interfaces offer the database a level of visualisation that could increase the versatility of the archive. This would also create a platform that can be used in a variety of art and design settings.

The lace analysis that we have so far explored is looking at a searchable database where by imagery will be organised with a range of yes/no or on/off and variable qualities therefore enabling a combination of visual qualities to be searched at the same time. And to also organise the imagery in a range of binary opposites to enable you consider if you want it to be more or less of one quality or another - Organic/Geometric, Linear/textural and Negative/positive. There may be a range of variables – depth, line, texture, and holes. This work is being developed further initially upon our intranet.

The lace project has also grown into two PhDs, one which will begin in October 2009 and one which is beginning in its 2nd year. The project which is being completed by Joy Buttress is an investigation and exploration of new and experimental concepts in contemporary textile art, combining the use of new technologies and historical research. The project will investigate the current use of lace in art / design that opens a new dialogue between the traditional and the contemporary. Historical themes of pattern and structure have been redirected, with traditional techniques being used to

achieve unconventional outcomes. As a textile art practitioner she will contribute to this process of reformation by using the extensive NTU lace collection as a resource for re-interpretation. The research will also investigate the changing use of lace patterns and structures in current fashion design, interior design and art textiles.

The project brings together the NTU lace archive and her current textile art practice offering the potential for experimentation and innovative textile art. The historical value and materiality of lace will be investigated and the influence of its structural importance on art and design practice in contemporary culture. The extensive NTU archive offers the potential to inspire not only her art practice but contribute to the revived interest in lace. This project is happening at a culturally important time when we are seeing a revival of lace in all aspects of art and design and when textile art is becoming a chosen medium of expression. As Janis Jefferies states:

'Textiles are at the very vanguard of contemporary art practices and social change today. They are now seen as the material culture of the future, with the potential to change the way we think, live and behave in an ever-increasing networked culture where our bodies ache and our gestures twitch with an excitable, physical determination to remake and make anew' Jefferies (2008)

The research project will reflect and research the cultural importance of lace and the use of pattern and structures in the collection as a tool for inspiration in textile art practice.

The NTU lace archive offers a unique collection on the development and production of the machine lace industry. The lace trade in the 19th and early 20th century was driven by the demand and desire to acquire clothes and textiles that were made of a fabric that offered no practical function but instead imbued the wearer or householder with a meaning of social status and a symbol of wealth. Thorstein Veblen in 1899 observed this symbol of wealth, he recognised what he distinguished as the 'Leisure class' and their outward showing of exemption from labour. This display of excessive spending and showmanship he describes as 'conspicuous consumption' (Veblen, 1899). Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson in their book 'Body Dressing' determining that the symbolism of dress and fashion is still important in our current culture, crucial in determining our acceptability, identity and distinction of class (Entwistle, Wilson, 2000).

Historically lace has always held an ambiguity of meaning that defines moods and emotional states from the veil of the virginal bride to the veil of the grieving widow. This flexibility of meaning has allowed it to be perceived on many levels in art and

design. The complex structure of lace reveals that the material is as important as the immaterial. Engaging with the use of light and space the unique transparency of lace creates a relationship with both the foreground and background. The fusion of creativity and technology have utilised the characteristics of lace, restoring a connection with craft and workmanship. Sculptor Cal Lane uses an oxyacetylene torch to burn out metal lace motifs onto mundane household objects. Playing with male and female conventions she produces spades and wheelbarrows that no longer have a practical function but instead become highly decorative objects. Dutch furniture designer Neils Van Eijk applies bobbin lace techniques to fibre optics to create ethereal lampshades (2002) that have an ethereal quality that interchanges as a functional light source and sculptural structure.

Lace as a resource for novel and exciting art and design applications is extensive. We intend to develop the unique qualities of the NTU lace archive as it is the largest collection of manufactured lace samples in the country. The intention is to increase access to benefit a wider audience as well as to develop its application as a teaching aid or to benefit commercial audiences.

A directional and exciting database using digital technology which enables visually orientated search facilities is an important factor of the research exploring innovative search facilities in relation to complex visual imagery. Enabling lost motifs and patterns to be explored creatively by designers and artists.

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Appendix Six: Visual Essay - DUCK- Research in Textiles and Textile Design (2010 issue one)

Katherine Townsend and Joy Buttress - High Falls Water, Lace and the Body

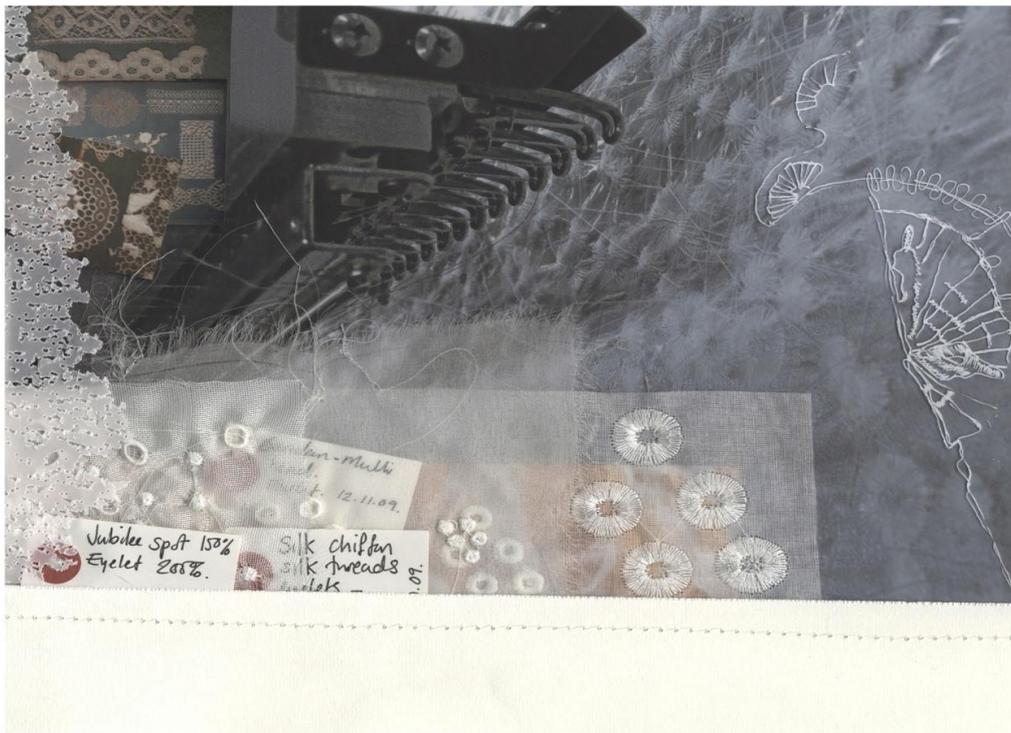
Dr. Katherine Townsend & Joy Buttress

High Falls : Water, lace and the body



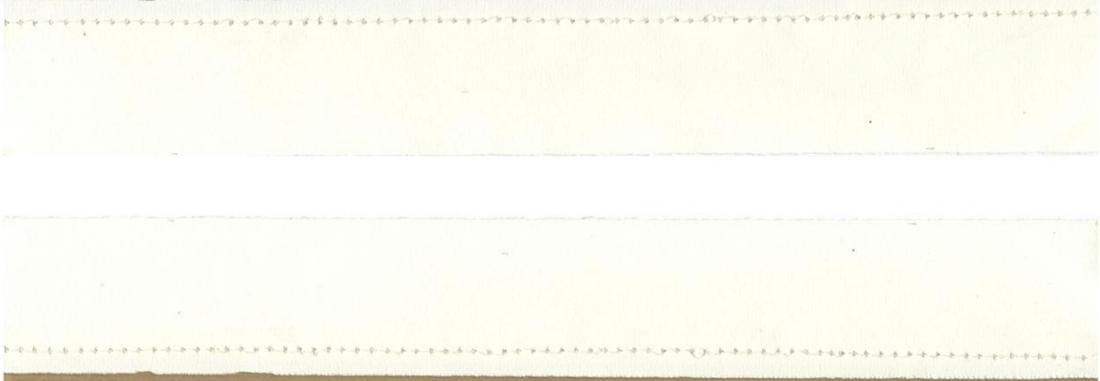
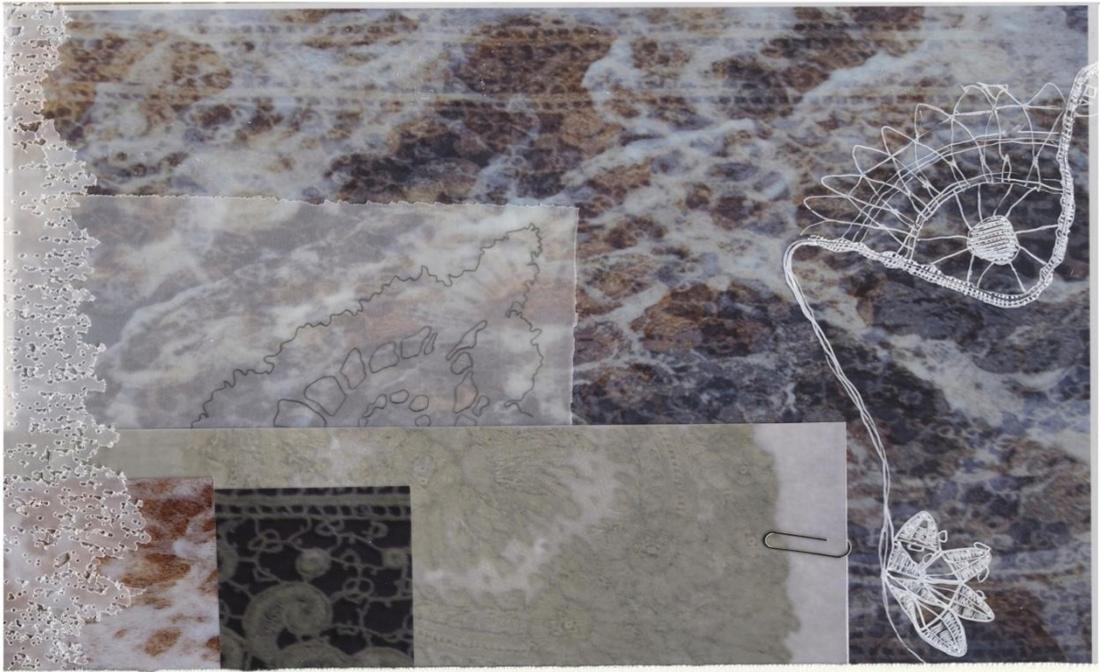
The art pieces in this exhibition explore the aesthetic relationship between images of flowing water and organic motifs found in the Nottingham Trent University Lace Archive. The practice-led research is focused on how digital technology can be applied and subverted to interpret abstract concepts, such as light and fluidity, to generate new textile narratives that celebrate space and form. The utilization of the characteristics of lace is both metaphorical and symbolic, restoring connections with craft, workmanship and nature.







Her clothing was a spatial-architectural rather than a sculptural-architectonic phenomenon. The human figure was conceived as a constructive carcass bracing, supporting the clothing at precise, designated points. Otherwise the outfits had a life of their own - the construction of the human body and a spatial envelope of fabric (Adaskina 1990: 303).



Things have become so accelerated that processes are no longer inscribed in a linear temporality, in a linear unfolding of history. Nothing moves any longer from cause to effect: everything is traversed by inversions of meaning, by perverse events, by ironic reversals. Acceleration, streams and turbulences, self-potentialization and chaotic effects (Baudrillard 2000: 77).





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Appendix Seven: Intricate Connections Conference Paper 2010

Nottingham Trent University

The Reciprocal action of lace and the body: lace as a tool of communication

ABSTRACT

This paper will analyse and investigate the notion that lace in fashion has an integral interplay and relationship with skin and the body to create a language of communication that has been present in clothing both historically and also currently in a contemporary context. The complex and unique structure of lace defines that the material is as important as the immaterial it creates a revealing and concealing interaction between fabric and the skin. Lace is a phenomenon that is once again relevant in our contemporary culture. Fashion is borrowing historical lace motifs to produce a contemporary aesthetic that is relevant to all.

LACE, BODY, SKIN, FASHION,

INTRODUCTION

Lace is distinctive from other fabrics, it's open work structure establishes that the holes are as important as the patterns created by the threads, 'lace is the only fabric that unites ornament and construction: it consists of nothing but ornament' (Thomas, 2008) Lace is formed and constructed by looping, twisting or knotting of threads to create a complex structure of networks that form intricate patterns and textures. The openness of the structure of the fabric and the historical associations provokes a reaction of appeal or repulsion in the viewer. This ambiguous meaning from purity to erotica has helped establish the long-term presence in the fashion market.

The delicate and purely decorative nature of lace has been used to convey and transmit strong associations of femininity throughout the history of fashion. It has played an important role in the adornment of our bodies to transmit signals of status, wealth and power. The embodiment of our self through dress, jewellery, body paint or tattoos is vital to our acceptance in all cultures around the world (Entwistle, 2000). The social conventions of dress are indicative to our society and the role of dressing and undressing has implications in a social context. Layers of clothing enable varying levels of communication, each transmitting to potentially different audiences and that the more layers removed the more intimate the viewer (Joseph, 1995). Lace as a fabric transcends those layers and takes the viewer straight to the intimate layer of

meaning, while offering a semi transparent cover it exposes glimpses of the body creating emotional responses in the wearer and viewer.

This paper will review a range of approaches to the body and dress in the context and application of lace in fashion. The interaction that lace has with the body to omit signals and messages will be explored and analysed. The intention is to develop an integrated account of the approaches and attitude to clothing and the body in a historical and contemporary context.

UNDRESSING THE BODY

A garment without the body offers the viewer no more than a visual experience. A garment with a body offers the viewer movement, sound, smell and a visual interplay. Whilst the nature of this relationship remains a current discourse for debate, the literature in both fields encompasses common themes. Theory on the body observes that the body is entangled with the self 'they have bodies and they are bodies' (Turner 1985:1). The body is also seen as an object in the world that is seen by others (Featherstone, 1982). Fashion and clothing are not seen as integral unison with the body but 'unimportant' as objects on the 'periphery of the body'. (Woodward, 2005) The outer body is sometimes acknowledged as the 'clothed body', but this area is not examined in any depth. Literature from history, cultural studies and psychology will often explore the significance of dress but almost entirely without recognition of the body.

Literature on lace also offers limited perspectives on the unique materiality and value of lace in our culture and the influence it has on the relationship with the body. Fashion literature records the chronological order of techniques and application, (Earnshaw 1985, Kraatz 1989). Historical literature focuses on the process and method as identification systems (Earnshaw 1984, Shepered 2000) or studies of the lace industry (Mason 1994, Halls 1973)). Documentation is also provided of high profile museum collections that offer a visual photographic record of lace in their collection and a brief history of lace (Browne 2004, Hashagan, Levey 2006). All these studies apart from Solstiss – the seduction of lace (Kraatz, 2006) that visually suggests a deeper understanding of the impact lace has as a tool of meaning, enticement and seduction, offer no debate on the use of lace as a language of communication.

The naked body is referred to historically in art, religion and literature in association with innocence and purity. The symbolic negativity of dress is indicated in Christianity with the fall of man by the clothing of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Hollander

suggests that the Christian virtue of human nakedness is strengthened by the personal delight in it and that nakedness has its own fierce effect on desires, but clothing with nakedness underneath is even more potent (1993: 85). Hollander also suggests that all art since 'modern fashion began are wearing ghosts of absent clothes' (1993: 86). This then suggests that the interface between the body and dress causes a reaction that is powerful and enticing.

These boundaries of reveal and conceal have been used as a reoccurring theme in fashion, exploring the notion of what is body and what is clothing (Boulwood Jerrard, 2000) Women throughout history have been uncovering their bodies at the rate of twelve inches a century (Harvey, 2008). Rita Lygid, a 1920's socialite designed her own dress that displayed her bare back to the waist setting new parameters for fashion. Yves Saint Laurent also used this theme in a dress in 1970 that exposed a large proportion of the back in black Chantilly lace, helping reinstate lace as a fashion fabric of seduction. Versace famously designed a dress held together with safety pins exposing large amounts of the sides of the body that became synonymous with the appearance of actress Liz Hurley on the red carpet at film premier (2004). Eastern culture has also used the seduction of skin to create an erotic charge. When wearing traditional kimono the Geisha will show the nape of the neck that has been painted white (Dalby 1993) and slightly raise the sleeve of the kimono when pouring tea, each act is associated with sensuality. The wearing of jewelry, clothes and tattoos adds a mystery to the body that makes it more provocative and infuses it with sexuality (Entwistle, 2000). The ornate construction of lace fabric covers the body in pattern creating a form of body art, enhancing the attributes of the form in delicate shapes and structures. Fashion designer Alexander McQueen referred to lace as a 'sophisticated form of tattooing' (2008).

LANGUAGE THROUGH DRESS

The social conventions of dress are indicative to society and the role of dressing and undressing has implications in our social context. A transition of communication through layers of clothes has the potential to transmit messages to a variety of audiences and in doing so has the possibility of presenting a different image of one's self (Joseph, 1995:80)

Lace as a fabric has the ability to transcend the layers of clothing and takes the viewer straight to an intimate layer of meaning, while offering a semi transparent cover it exposes glimpses of the body creating emotional responses in the wearer and viewer. This form of communication can be seen as a language, both Barthes

(1993) and Lurie (1992) have applied a 'linguistic' analysis to fashion and clothing. The wearing of clothing Barthes acknowledges is for modesty, ornamentation but more importantly it is an 'act of meaning' that is profoundly sociological (2006: 97) Lurie suggests that specific garments invoke a language with a 'vocabulary' and that they have a 'grammar' this interpretation has been criticised for being too simplistic in its execution of a highly complex form of non verbal communication. McCracken (1988) claimed that this analogy is inappropriate as this message is not read like a language but interpreted holistically. A holistic interpretation encompasses the moving body. The wearer also responds to a reaction from the world outside which in turn can affect their behavior and responses. In Woodward's ethnographical study of women in London and their assemblage of dress, she found that the relationship between the internal and external self was prevalent. Clothes played a strategic part in the woman's well being and exposed an inhibited self. Clothing prevented them from becoming the 'kind of self they would otherwise have wished to construct, let alone influence anyone else' (Woodward, 2007: 22). Clothing and the body combined create a complicated web of messages that can cause an ambiguity of meaning for both wearer and the viewer. Fashion will often determine cultural identities 'marking out particular kinds of bodies, drawing distinction in terms of class and status, gender, age, sub-cultural affiliations that otherwise would not be so visible or significant' Entwistle and Wilson (2001).

THE REINTERPRETATION OF LACE IN FASHION

'blown backwards into the future' (Evans 2009: 14)

Historical lace motifs are being replicated and recycled into fashion collections on catwalks globally. The evocative characteristics of lace reinvigorate notions of wealth, craftsmanship and status in the context of haute couture collections. The unique ambiguity of lace has also been explored and exploited to convey wealth while portraying sexuality and a darker side of fashion. McQueen first used lace, for his 'Highland Rape' (1995) collection. His portrayal of semi clothed women appearing dazed and confused in torn and distressed lace and tartan attracted hostile press coverage. Prada's 2008/09 collections used guipure lace to expose and conceal the body using traditional and classically styled clothing to reveal glimpses of unexpected parts of the body. Christopher Kane in his 2009/10 collections has married black leather, embroidery and lace to create garments that play with the balance of purity and eroticism. This borrowing and drawing from the past to recreate an image for the future is conveyed by Evans (2009) as a way of bringing together historically separate themes and returning to the same point via different routes. This eclectic

gathering of history is criticised by Jameson (1984) as a deathly recycling of history that has no meaning. This has not stopped the continued use of historical references and themes being interplayed with each other to produce contemporary interpretations that are played out in current fashion. Lace has been reinterpreted to form a hybrid that is crafted from the past and present encompassing old associations while embracing the new. Clothing and fashion have consistently been synonymous with sexual availability and erotic taste (Davis 1992) sex appeal plays a significant part in the allure of fashionable dress. Lace has the ability to cross the boundaries of social identities to encompass modesty, eroticism or a tension between the two. This enables lace to be used and reused in fashion design as a reoccurring theme to transmit and explore a variety of concepts.

SKIN REVEALS SKIN – PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH

Practice-based research is a form of enquiry that ‘ helps understand the uniquely human process of making and meaning, by engaging with experience as it is lived, felt reconstructed, reinterpreted and understood’. (Sullivan 2005: 96)

Nottingham played a central role in the world lace trade from 1760 onwards. The Nottingham School of Art was founded in 1848 to teach and develop new designers for the growing local machine lace industry. The school’s governors, prominent lace manufacturers, donated and bequeathed lace samples and other items to the school, founding the current archive. The archive holds 75,000 examples of lace, as single pieces, as items in manufacturers sample books, as portfolios of machine-made and hand-made lace.

Skin reveals skin will integrate art practice and the Nottingham Trent University lace archive as a tool for investigation into new and experimental concepts in contemporary textiles. The work will open a new dialogue between the traditional and the current. Historical themes of lace pattern and structure are being interpreted as a creative journey of redirection. Traditional techniques and new technology will be combined to achieve unconventional and unexpected outcomes that will challenge perceptions of lace as a fabric.

The NTU archive holds a number of design portfolios that were used as inspiration for the Nottingham lace designers and manufacturers. The portfolios were obtained from European Great Exhibitions from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. The portfolio I found of particular interest was produced in Plaun, Germany and shown at the Great Exhibition in Brussels 1910. The portfolio contains 24 plates of designs inspired by natural forms found in the flora and fauna of nature,

(unfortunately the designer is not named). The portfolio is a rich resource for study and research, engaging my art practice with historical lace patterns that can be translated into contemporary concepts in my work.

The complex and sophisticated construction of lace creates a transparency, offering a relationship with both skin (the body) and the garment. Lace has a unique quality of structure that has an ambiguity of meaning like no other fabric. The body and lace work simultaneously to create emotional responses in not only the embodied, but also the observer. My work explores the concept of the interaction of lace with the body. Leather gloves offer me the surface of skin and a symbolism that reflects the ambiguity of meaning that lace has as a fabric. Gloves have historical significance from status and position, war and love; they protect, conceal and limit touch. The use of historical lace motifs etched and cut into the surface of the leather will expose the skin beneath and explore the interconnection that lace has with the material and the immaterial.

Conclusion

'Fashion is about bodies: it is produced, promoted and worn by bodies' (Entwistle 2000:1) There is an expected conformity to dressing the body in western society. The body has become an increasing presence in the emotional wellbeing of our self. The body plays an important part in the way we feel. Svendsen (2007) talks of an age where the body beautiful is as important as the clothes we wear over it. In order to gain the perfect body men and women will go to dramatic lengths to achieve it. Cosmetic surgery is a mushrooming industry with people of all ages striving for the 'ideal' of the physical self. The body has become a malleable form that can be recreated to produce the desired ideal outcome. Consumer culture, advertisements, the popular press, television and films provide a constant bombardment of stylised images of the body. The body has become objectified from the influences of consumer culture and parameters of expectation have been layered (Featherstone 2006).

Fashion plays a major role in dressing the body and offering the latest look and aesthetic for that season. The reveal/conceal aspect of fashion interacts with the body to form layers of meaning that increase the visual presence of the body. The juxtaposition of various elements of clothing and the body create complex and ambiguous messages (Boulton, Jerrard, 2000) Fashion plays a crucial link with everyday dress and our society. Entwistle argues that we need to examine the way in

which fashion has made the body socially identifiable and the making of the dressed body is important in the development of modern society.

Lace has been used historically to transmit and translate a variety of messages to the viewer. Historically it has offered a variety of meanings, from wealth, social status, power and eroticism. The complex and sophisticated construction of lace creates a transparency, offering a visual relationship with the body, clothing and through association fashion. The body and lace work simultaneously to create emotional responses in not only the embodied, but also the observer. This then gives rise to new thought on the entwined and significant relationship lace has with the body, clothing and fashion in our current consumer culture.

Lace fabric when applied to clothing transforms the relationship fabric has with skin, the open work structure embraces the body behind the fabric to create a sensual interplay that seduces or repels the viewer. The unique transparency of the lace fabric creates an intimate engagement with the body that challenges current thought on the relationship the body has with clothing and the powerful influence that fashion can have as a transmitter of symbolic messages that effect the emotional state of the wearer and cause a reaction in the observer. This then gives rise to new thought on the significant relationship that fashion has with the body, clothing in our current consumer culture.

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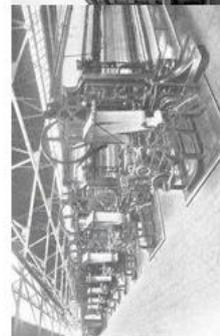
Appendix Eight: Love Lace Exhibition Powerhouse Museum 2011

Proposal for artwork and finished piece of artwork for exhibition

skin reveals skin : historical research - Nottingham Trent University Lace Archive

Nottingham played a central role in the world lace trade from 1760 onwards. The Nottingham School of Art was founded in 1848 to teach and develop new designers for the growing local machine lace industry. The school's governors, prominent lace manufacturers, donated and bequeathed lace samples and other items to the school, founding the current archive. The archive holds 75,000 examples of lace, as single pieces, as items in manufacturers sample books, as portfolios of machine-made and hand-made lace.

skin reveals skin will integrate art practice and the Nottingham Trent University lace archive as a tool for investigation into new and experimental concepts in contemporary textiles. The work will open a new dialogue between the traditional and the current. Historical themes of lace pattern and structure are being interpreted as a creative journey of redirection. Traditional techniques and new technology will be combined to achieve unconventional and unexpected outcomes that will challenge perceptions of lace as a fabric.



Nottingham lace workers



Nottingham Lace warehouse



Nottingham lace workers



NTU lace archive



NTU design portfolio

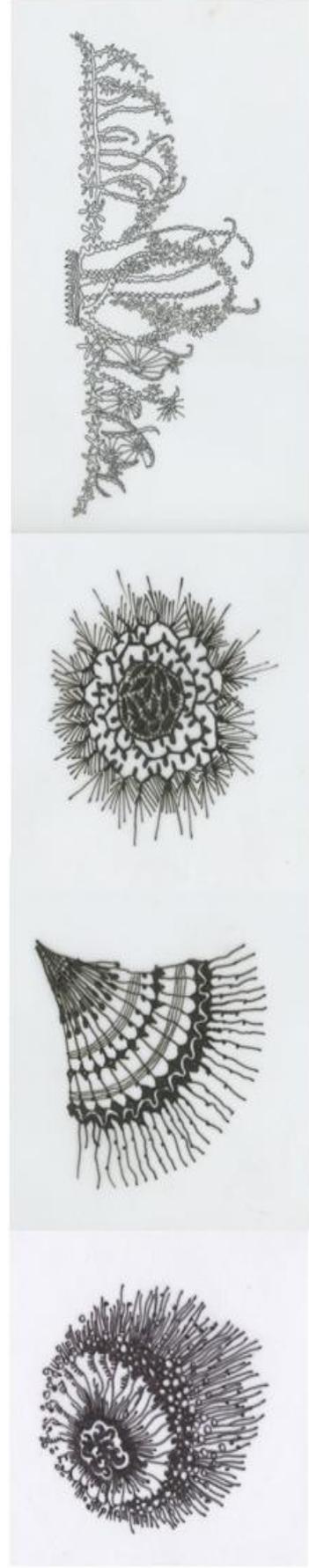


NTU lace sample book

skin reveals skin : inspiration - lace design portfolio

The NTU archive holds a number of design portfolios that we used as inspiration for the Nottingham lace designers and manufacturers. The portfolios were obtained from European Great Exhibitions from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. The portfolio I found of particular interest was produced in Plaun, Germany and shown at the Great Exhibition in Brussels 1910. The portfolio contains 24 plates of designs inspired by natural forms found in the flora and fauna of nature, (unfortunately the designer is not named). The portfolio is a rich resource for study and research, engaging my art practice with historical lace patterns that can be translated into contemporary concepts in my work.

Joy Buttriss drawing taken from plates in the design portfolio



skin reveals skin : concept - lace and skin

The complex and sophisticated construction of lace creates a transparency, offering a relationship with both skin (the body) and the garment. Lace has a unique quality of structure that has an ambiguity of meaning like no other fabric. The body and lace work simultaneously to create emotional responses in not only the embodied, but also the observer.

I am interested in exploring the concept of the interaction of lace with the body. Leather gloves offer me the surface of skin and a symbolism that reflects the ambiguity of meaning that lace has as a fabric. Gloves have historical significance from status and position, to war and love, they protect, conceal and limit touch.

The use of historical lace motifs etched and cut into the surface of the leather will expose the skin beneath and explore the interconnection that lace has with the material and the immaterial.



Joy Buttruss drawings from the NTU lace archive

vintage pricking pattern for lace making

Joy Buttruss
sample ; leather - soldering iron

Joy Buttruss
sample ; vintage leather glove - soldering iron

Joy Buttriss - proposal category - fashion accessory skin reveals skin

materials : long white leather
opera gloves

Techniques : hand drawn images
will be digitised using photoshop and
illustrator software to prepare for use
with a digital laser cutter. The laser
cutter will be used as a drawing tool
manipulated by myself to etch and
cut the leather. The overlaying and
repetition controlled by myself will
subvert the machine process
creating random patterns built from
the historical lace motifs. The etching/
cut surface of the leather will create
lace like structures formed in the
leather.



Glove one -Skin Reveals Skin (2011)



Appendix Nine: Sources of illustrations

Figure 6, Cal Lane - Image in: Jay, H, Bendar, C, Packer (2009) Lace in Translation. Philadelphia: The Design Centre at Philadelphia University p. 15

Figure 7, Demarsksvan – image in Jay, H, Bendar, C, Packer (2009) Lace in Translation. Philadelphia: The Design Centre at Philadelphia University p. 49

Figure 8, Helen Pynor - image in Ward, L (2011) Love Lace. Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing p. 108

Figure 9, Ann Wilson, Topologies (2002). Source www.annwilsonartist.com/topologies-images.html accessed 25.10.11

Figure 10, Kira O'Reilly, Blood Lace (2002). Source www.hotgates.stanford.edu:3455/collaboratory/98?view=print accessed 20.10.11

Figure 11, Miranda Whall – Lace drawings (2004). Source www.mirandawhall.com/install.html accessed 20.10.11

Figure 12, Chiharu Chiota , After the Dream (2012) photo Sunhi Mang. Source <http://www.chiharu-shiota.com/works-2011/> accessed 15.01.13

Figure 13, Walter Oltmann , Woman and Child (2007). Image in Vitkiene ,V, Carroll, E, Geluniene. Textile 07, Kaunas Artists Support Fund p173

Figure 14, Doris Salcedo, Untitled (1985-95). Source <http://blog.art21.org/2009/12/09/confronting-history/> accessed 6.11.11

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