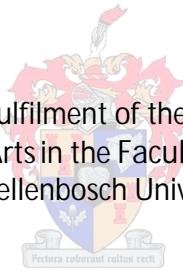


# Surfacing Fat: Adiposity as Adornment

by  
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of Master of Arts in Visual Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
at Stellenbosch University



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## Declaration

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## Abstract

This thesis provides a critical discussion of, and motivation for, my jewellery practice, in which fat from the human body is transformed into adornment. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's theory of 'abjection', this research scrutinises the grotesque status of body substances in the modern media, with the intention of changing viewer reactions to these substances from repulsion to aesthetic enjoyment. I consider the influence of popular culture, where idealised bodies are promoted as 'better' than non-normative body types, and then consider how (or whether) the abject remainders of the 'ideal body' can successfully be refigured as adornment. In order to situate my practical Masters work in the wider field of contemporary avant-garde jewellery practice, I study the work of select jewellers, who also refer to, or use, body substances in critical ways in their work. Through this, I hope to scrutinise both normative notions of the body and of jewellery as adornment.

## Opsomming

Hierdie tesis dien as 'n kritiese bespreking van en motivering vir my praktiese juweliersware-ontwerp, waarin vet afkomstig van die menslike liggaam verander word in versiering. Die navorsing gebruik Julia Kristeva se teorie van 'abjection' om die groteske status wat liggaamstowwe in die moderne media het, uit te pluus, met die doel om die toeskouer se reaksie op hierdie stowwe van afkeer in estetiese genot te verander. Ek oorweeg die invloed van populêre kultuur waarbinne geïdealiseerde liggames as 'beter' as nie-normatiewe liggaamstipes aangebied word. Ek kyk verder na hoe (en of) die vernederende ('abject') oorblyfsels van die 'ideale liggaam' suksesvol as versiering omvorm kan word. Om my praktiese werk vir die Meestersgraad binne die wyer veld van kontemporêre avant-garde juwelierswarepraktyk te vestig, ondersoek ek ook werk van sekere juweliers wat ook liggaamstowwe in hulle werk gebruik, of daarna verwys. Hierdeur hoop ek om die normatiewe idees van beide die liggaam en juweliersware as versiering uit te pluus.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Jewellery is a commodity that most people prize partly due to its monetary value but also because of the appeal and prestige it implies in being owned and worn. This can be likened to perceptions held about the body in contemporary society. One perception is that the body has gradually developed a commodified status, much like that of jewellery. This attitude is accredited to the alterable quality of the human body, an action initiated by attempts to attain idealistic notions of perfect health and beauty.

Chemicals, medication and even cosmetic surgery are some of the methods employed to alter bodies, though this practice is not limited to contemporary society. Further examples include scarification, tattooing and piercing, ancient methods of altering and adorning the body that are still practised today. Christoph Zellweger, a renowned contemporary jeweller, has this to say with regard to signification in jewellery and plastic surgery:

In the same way that everyone once wanted a little gold chain around their neck, now it's about the size of your breasts or the straightness of your nose. So, what I'm saying with my work is that the body itself is the new jewel, which makes it open to trivialization, on the one hand, but also, on the other hand, of imbuing a new meaning - one can now design the body in such a way as to put meaning on to it (Christoph Zellweger – portrait 2009).

This view inspired my own research into the relationship between body and jewellery. Following Zellweger's perceptions<sup>1</sup> of the body, I have found an interesting link between the artificial modification of the human physique and adornment.

### 1.1 Background

Fat cells are a component of the human (and animal) body that serves a purpose: to insulate, provide security in the form of a shock absorber and store energy to use in the event of activity. What is interesting, though, is that this fact is overlooked largely due to the perceived undesirable aesthetic attention fat has acquired. When there is either an extreme lack or, in contrast, an excess of this component, the perception of ethical bodily

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<sup>1</sup> Note that Zellweger gives his own opinion on the state of contemporary jewellery and the body in contemporary discourse. His statement does not in any way represent contemporary jewellery theory and ideologies as a whole.

maintenance regards this is an indication of ill health and unattractiveness. Furthermore, and as my argument in elaborating on Zellweger's statement asserts, the pliable nature of fat could represent a component its wearer has 'control' over altering. Thus, my argument is that fat constitutes an adornment, something that is alterable and wearable at the same time. This relationship is however conditioned within the specific context of fat cells existing outside the body and the manipulation thereof requires interaction with matter that is more commonly associated with the abject and consequently, the grotesque.

It should be noted here that the use of the term 'grotesque', as it is contextualised in this study, relates to an understanding of: "a body in the act of becoming ... never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" (Bakhtin cited in Connelly 2003:4). The grotesque is therefore understood to emphasise the materiality of a body and in this way foregrounds the non-normative<sup>2</sup> description attributed to body types where the term 'abject' is employed especially since the bodies being considered for this research are of a 'transgressional' nature. This is to say that bodies which do not conform to idealised notions of perfect health and beauty are not necessarily analysed in a reductionist (good/bad) method but rather provide an alternative perspective of body types accommodated in our visual domain.

The research in this thesis comprises two prominent themes, namely abjection and adornment. Psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva draws attention to a theory on abjection in her book titled *POWERS of HORROR an Essay on Abjection* (1982). My research is based on and explores this theory, because of its explicit reference to undesirable elements in our bodies, which in the case of this thesis pertains to fat. To provide a more concise description of what abjection 'is', I include a quotation on Kristeva's work:

In that work, Kristeva outlines a psychoanalytic theory of the subject where there is a pre-symbolic phase characterised by strong feelings of horror and revulsion in relation to certain objects, people and situations. What is abject is decidedly not desired; it thus has a strong negative status attached to it. It is what an identity rejects because it instils horror (Key Contemporary Concepts 2003. Sv. 'abjection').

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<sup>2</sup> The use of the term 'non-normative' aims to emphasise a state which is contrary to a standard. In the context of this research it describes a body type which is physically contrary to 'standard' body types which are assumed to be revered in popular culture. This reading is an appropriation of the dictionary definition for the word 'normative'. (Websters New Universal Unabridged Dictionary. 1983. Sv. 'normative')

Adornment is used here as an alternative term for jewellery or any other means of decorating the body. This intention is based on the premise that the work may not always, at first sight, be attractive, and the audience is encouraged to contemplate their intrinsic merit before designating a value status to them. My intention in the practical component is to emulate the microscopic appearance of the bodily substance of fat as realistically as possible, a counterfoil to the conventional aesthetic of precious jewellery. Therefore the description of adornment is preferred rather than jewellery, although the classification of contemporary jewellery may also appear appropriate.

I apply the term contemporary jewellery as a progressive idea which first emerged in Europe circa 1950. Although the date may be contested (there are opinions that contemporary jewellery had its beginnings much earlier and can be seen in the work of René Lalique during the Art Nouveau period), the type of work I refer to here relates mostly to that produced after the institutionalisation of jewellery practice. I also consider the progressive influence that academic study has had on the aesthetics and motivations of the work of this period. With this understanding in mind, contemporary jewellery is seen as the precursor to the current situation experienced when an audience is presented with work produced by 'jewellers', which cannot at times be strictly confined to a specific practice (as is evident in the work highlighted in this research). Furthermore it should be noted that this research views contemporary jewellery from a Eurocentric perspective.

This method in investigating the body-object relationship would provide an alternative approach to representing the body as adornment. The body-object relationship described in this research pertains to an understanding of the term *Bildleib* (von Graevenitz 2000:14). This term is influenced by Gijs Bakker's 'body-image' concept where the body is intrinsically linked to an understanding of the object of adornment being worn. This understanding is fundamental to regarding the practical component of this study as part of the contemporary jewellery rhetoric as well as counteracting it through interpreting the adornment as anti-jewellery jewellery.

Jewellery is conventionally positioned as ornate objects which act as emotional receptacles for their wearers or owners. Through this, commercial jewellery is created in an

aesthetically pleasing format to enhance the appeal of the wearer's body. Thus, an appealing jewel is assumed to be associated with an appealing body. Yet, popular culture reproduces images of bodies which range from ideal to unappealing with the purpose of inciting specific perceptions of body types. This power relation highlighted by inciting perceptions of the body, is articulated in this research through a Foucauldian interpretation of 'spectacle' which propagates a visual relationship between the body of a spectator and varying forms of biopower, a power relation being "exercised indirectly upon the body" (Sturken & Cartwright 2001:97). The work promoted by this study aims to critique this situation by representing, what some might consider undesirable body matter, fat as a contradictory product (adornment) as a means of converting the abject into something aesthetically pleasing. Here the description of anti-jewellery jewellery becomes applicable since the impression of this approach, according to Oppi Untracht, a revered jewellery practitioner, "challenges established concepts of design, subject suitability, materials, etc." (1982:12). Considering the morphology of fat as adornment aptly conforms to a process of challenging established jewellery conventions.

## 1.2 Problem statement

As was highlighted earlier, the quotation by Zellweger has had an impact on my perception of the body and jewellery. Although I do not entirely agree with the alteration of the body to the extent that it becomes a jewel, the idea of 'wearing the body' has been a revelation, especially in relation to the increase in plastic surgery procedures.

My research question consequently is:

Is it viable<sup>3</sup> for an abject substance such as fat cells (as well as representations thereof) to be regarded as a type of adornment, taking into consideration the increasing forms of commodification of the body practiced in contemporary society?

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<sup>3</sup> This argument is in favour of the possible link between the opposite ideas of 'abject' and 'adornment' to validate the use of fat as a form of contemporary jewellery. This idea is validated throughout the research by highlighting existing perceptions of the non-normative body, commodification of the body and cosmetic surgery in association with notions of 'fat', 'abjection' and 'adornment'.

This enquiry has spurred my motivation to analyse discourses pertaining to both abjection and adornment as a means to augment the use of fat cells in my own art practice within the contemporary jewellery discipline.

My aims are to:

- indicate that the body has evolved from an area of interest for contemporary jewellers to a medium used in more explicit and radical representations, indicating an intimate link between the body and jewellery;
- emphasise that non-normative forms of the body are of interest to the public and that this is evident by their gazing on non-normative representations presented as spectacles;
- highlight that the body has progressively become a commodity in both medical but more specifically social contexts, to act as symbol, most often of status, and
- produce practical work which, due to its tangible and pseudo realistic status, primes viewers for the realisation that their bodies comprise 'objects' capable of being instilled with meaning similar to the way jewels act as receptacles of abstract meanings/emotions.

This research is thus focused on innovative forms of adorning the body and the proposition that being adorned with increasingly abject objects is becoming progressively acceptable in society.

### 1.3 Scope of study

The decision to incorporate descriptions of both abjection and adornment might seem to carry within itself a possible contradiction, yet it is a viable comparison and the relationship between the two ideas is an approach that I perceive to be unique to conventional contemporary jewellery discourse.

Approaching this topic requires consolidating fat as taboo, hidden matter and exposing it as a type of adornment. For this reason this research is developed over three phases.

The first phase acknowledges the practices of contemporary jewellery as relating to the external world of the physical body. Here superficial issues concerning the structure of the body, from conventional representations to non-normative extremes, are highlighted. This phase functions outside the proverbial border marked by the skin's surface and places significance on concepts related to the gaze in contemporary society and popular culture.

The second phase moves closer to the surface of the body and not only critiques it as being structured or conditioned to conform to ideals observed in the first phase, but penetrates the surface through discussions of invasive procedures. These procedures are linked to aggressive ways of valuing the body through commodifying body ideals as well as whole bodies and their parts. It is at this stage where abjection truly manifests since surgical processes invite discussions on abjection where body matter which was once contained in the safe confines of the body, is exposed and allowed to escape the border of the skin. Here fat as an abject substance is truly realised but its status is tentative since the grotesque does not invite aesthetic pleasure.

The third and final phase is represented by body matter having finally been liberated from the confines of the body. In this context internal body matter is exposed providing an opportunity to value the abjected matter differently. Anatomical models represent these aims as a tangible interface with human physiology and also present this information in a format which is appealing, albeit to a select audience. The tangible relationship with the body in this context is considered to be an ideal circumstance to be echoed in the practical component of this research. Fat is presented in a way that invites an audience to interact with what is conventionally hidden and hopefully through this interaction creates new meaning and value for what may be considered abjected, 'repulsive' body matter.

These phases encompass various fields of interest dedicated to the creation of wearable art. For this reason fat is represented by the study as outside the ambit of any one specific field of interest (social, surgical, anatomical, jewellery) whilst still being open to interpretation by each.



## 1.4 Review of literature

The following texts served as primary sources of inspiration and interest for this thesis. There are also many subsidiary texts not cited in this survey that have proven to be valuable in the formation of this argument.

The theory of abjection is the principle basis on which this research was developed and Julia Kristeva's *POWERS of HORROR an Essay on Abjection* (1982), is the primary source for the theoretical component of this study. Particularly important is her classification of profane and dejected by-products of the body, as abject. The first chapter in this book, titled "Approaching Abjection" (Kristeva 1982:1-31) prompted me to concentrate on two particular features of the theory on abjection.

The first feature relates to waste products passing the border of the body (Kristeva 1982:3) which is of particular relevance to my study. The understanding that the loss of the excessive adipose<sup>4</sup> (fat) matter can be equated with bodily refuse is fuel for my argument (this is to be understood as relating to cosmetic surgery in particular). The second feature would be that the body does not conform to conventional representations where ambiguity or a lack of familiarity is experienced (Kristeva 1982:5). This particular circumstance is illustrated in the physical deformation or alteration of the body's limbs, rendering it visually disturbing and unpleasant, for instance when the focus is placed on non-normative body types and unconventional modifications for various unique reasons. These two features have provided me with the opportunity to discuss works not conventionally perceived as jewellery yet, which also represent an intimate relationship with the body and through this feature, prompt ideas in reclassifying what constitutes body adornment.

In order to begin the process of reclassifying body adornment, an overview of the historical context of the jewellery practice is necessary. I had consulted sources that vary in terms of historical approaches to contemporary jewellery practice, as well as in the interpretation of

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'adiposity' is defined in Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary as being "1. The state of being adipose; obesity. 2. A tendency to become obese" (1983. Sv. 'adiposity'). This is the definition intended wherever the word is employed in this research.

its contextual value as perceived in both the academic sphere and visual culture. Attention is drawn to the fact that most sources are Eurocentric because contemporary jewellery practice originated on the European continent and spread from there.

The first significant source is an essay by Bruce Metcalf titled "On the Nature of Jewelry" (1989). Although not cited in the text, this essay assisted in clarifying the classification of what exactly constitutes jewellery and distinguishing this practice from sculpture-related crafts. A more historical account of the development to academic interests in contemporary jewellery was sourced from *Twentieth-century Jewellery, From Art Nouveau to Contemporary Design in Europe and the United States* (Cappellieri 2010) which presented a comprehensive account of this development as an art form during the twentieth century. Although thorough in its descriptions, this text assisted mainly with contextualising historical events and the evolvement of the new aesthetic in contemporary jewellery which stemmed from these events.

Having accounted for the history of contemporary jewellery, additional texts from authors such as Paul Derrez (2005), Peter Dormer and Ralph Turner (1985) as well as Oppi Untracht (1982) attempt to contextualise the practices of wearable art, author jewellery, jewellery as adornment and anti-jewellery jewellery within a contemporary jewellery discourse and have in turn assisted in strengthening the development of this research in my practical component. In addition, the work of Nanna Melland (2005), Gijs Bakker as described by Antje von Graevenitz (2000) and especially Lauren Kalman has had an impressionable influence on the development of my practical component. It is particularly the current series *Spectacular* by Lauren Kalman which partly motivated my use of materials not conventionally associated with jewellery to create body adornment. Her explicit focus on spectatorship, the sexual gaze and voyeurism complimented by her use of these terms in relation to the fashion industry and 'freak shows', had strongly influenced my intention to bring to the fore the concepts of the gaze and commodification with regard to abject body matter and non-normative body types.

Included in this list of sources is a book titled *Culture, Bodies and the Sociology of Health* (Ettorre 2010). Although this is a composite of various authors' work, the following articles

included in it "The Visible Body" by Rui Gomes (85-105), "The Internet and Medicalization" by Peter Conrad and Ashley Rondini (107-120) and "Where the Excess Grows" by Shirlene Badger (137-154), in particular, have provided a much needed contextualisation of health and sociology and its relationship with representations of abjection in society. This is necessary for putting medical conditions in a sociological context, and further provides relevant information about the applications of this subject matter in the visual arts.

Although slight references to concepts such as the medical gaze and carnal art are related to discussions about cosmetic surgery and commodification in this research, it is primarily the essays of Norman Cherry (2006) and Christoph Zellweger's *Foreign Bodies* (2007) that fuelled the focus of motivating that the body is becoming like a commodity. Consequently the exhibition and catalogue essays of Gunther von Hagens' *Body Worlds* (2009) where links can be made between the gaze, spectacle, carnal art and van Hagens' preservation process of 'plastination' inspired the development of my practical component and assisted in contextualising the theory in its reference to abject body matter and aesthetic appeal, an association which stands as the foundation of this research being in favour of the morphology of fat being created as an adornment.

## 1.5 Chapter overview

What follows briefly summarises the major issues dealt with in each of the chapters of this research.

### Chapter 2

After the introduction to the subject in Chapter 1, this second chapter gives a brief historical account of the incorporation of the body in contemporary jewellery design. The aim is to introduce the discourse of the body as adornment in a gradual manner to allow the many options which exist for designing and observing the body in specific ways to become manifest. These ideas and perceptions are developed with regard to an obese body where the gaze, especially spectatorship, is discussed. Obesity (a non-normative body type) is the primary focus and the comparative introduction of Lauren Kalman's *Spectacular (s.a.)* series,

dealing with the ailment known as 'elephantiasis', assists in interpreting obesity as spectacle.

### Chapter 3

Chapter 3 provides a brief insight into the classification of the body as commodity. The implications of achieving an idealised body type are discussed in terms of the methods employed to reach this ideal, namely cosmetic surgery as well as the emotional impact that this procedure has on the patient. The purpose for including it is to highlight the likeness which body modification has to notions of adornment conventionally associated with jewellery and also as a way to introduce the work of Christoph Zellweger along with his latest contribution of Excessories (Presentation s.a.) to the current discourse in contemporary jewellery.

### Chapter 4

This chapter comprises a critical approach to the practical component of my study with careful regard to the already very sensitive subject matter of obesity. The primary aim is to position the practical component in a context which explores a reinterpretation of jewellery (anti-jewellery) and proposes it as adornment. This reinterpretation is discussed in terms of a link to the presentation of body matter in Gunther von Hagens' Body Worlds exhibition and considers the possibility that the object may be refigured as aesthetically pleasing. The work produced is argued as favouring a more sculptural approach but the wearable feature of the pieces hints at its reinterpretation as anti-jewellery jewellery.

### Chapter 5

The study is concluded with the final chapter in which the insights derived and findings of the project are described.

## Chapter 2:

### The body as spectacle in contemporary jewellery

This chapter provides a brief discussion of the development of contemporary jewellery and the use and representation of the body. It is followed by a description of the gaze and its relation to non-normative body types, which serves as an introduction to the work of Lauren Kalman - a contemporary jeweller who engages with the body and the concept of 'the spectacle'.

#### 2.1 The significance of the body in contemporary jewellery : Gijs Bakker, Nanna Melland

This section aims at contextualising the body in contemporary jewellery discourse. My own research into jewellery of an intimately bodily nature has broadened my understanding of body-object relationships and helped me to understand to what limits such representations may be pushed. Jewellery in the West mainly engages the body as object on which ornaments are hung. More recently the relationship between object and body has been radically reconsidered and frequently the body itself is taken as inspiration for jewellery.<sup>5</sup>

Jewellery is commonly associated with decoration, borne out by the frequency of designs which have no logical 'conversation' with the body. What is meant by this is that quaint depictions of affection (such as hearts and lockets) are presented as pendants, earrings and rings. These designs appear in the commercial realm and serve mainly uncritical, popular markets. In addition, the use of precious materials evokes "ostentatiously impressive and expensive" feelings about the objects (Dormer & Turner 1985:7). These two factors dominate the jewellery repertoire and commercial forms of attachment to the body are a prerequisite for this type of object. What contemporary jewellery offers is a variant to this type of commercialism.

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<sup>5</sup> Considering that this thesis prominently engages the Western tradition of jewellery making, I will not be considering jewellery practices and body ornamentation in non-Western traditions.

Contemporary jewellery is designed and created with a more integrative relationship to the body in mind. This is not to say that the development of contemporary jewellery has eliminated the need to create simple decorative items, but rather that it has promoted the search for additional significance with which to imbue decorative elements. This is variously identified as 'art jewellery', 'wearable art' and 'body adornment', but 'author jewellery' would perhaps be a more apt description (Derrez 2005:12). Concepts other than sentimentality have found their way into the creation of objects of adornment and along with technical advancements and innovations, this field has undergone much change and has been in a state of flux since the 1960s (Dormer & Turner 1985:18). These changes are broadly referred to in this thesis as contemporary jewellery.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s a new breed of jewellery practitioners began to graduate from European institutions with long-standing traditions of either art or jewellery education. This new wave of talent took a strong interest in artistic contemporary jewellery because of the "encouraged points of contact between artistic experiments and traditional jewellery" (Cappellieri 2010:43) which had developed during the 1960s. These 'artistic experiments' followed advancements in the technological field which provided practitioners with a wealth of new techniques (Cappellieri 2010:43). The added introduction of new media resulted in the creation of jewellery objects which had both aesthetically pleasing and informative attributes. New media refers to the use of materials not conventionally associated with traditional notions of jewellery. This is assumed to have been spurred on by the desire to develop "new meaning and a new language of form – a new aesthetic" where "[a]ny kind of material and technique can be used" (Derrez 2005:13). Jewellery pieces became explicit 'messengers' which carried a significance that surpassed their ornate functions. This is not to say that meaning was not important in earlier jewellery. Nor does it imply that aesthetics were formerly the only attributes validating an object as a jewel since contemporary jewellers are assumed to be "interested in investing modern jewelry with some of its historical symbolic or ritualistic power" (English & Dormer 1995:16).

It is important to note that the period spanning almost three decades from the 1960s to the 1980s was regarded as the 'golden years in creativity'.

Derrez (2005:12) states:

When in the late 1960s traditional social, political and cultural structures began to be broken down, there was simultaneously an invigorating and exciting experimentation in jewellery design. This experimentation continued throughout the 1970s and 80s, as complete freedom was created regarding form, material, technique, production methods, serial production and jewellery's relationship to the body - anything became possible ... these were 'golden' years in which creativity and personal development were considered more important than marketability.

Thus the 'golden years in creativity' refer specifically to jewellery produced in Europe (and less frequently America) at the cutting edge of avant-garde jewellery practices (Derrez 2005:12). As such, this brief overview has a dominant Eurocentric focus.

Materials used in the creation of contemporary jewellery have become a relevant marker in distinguishing these objects from more commercial forms of jewellery. The Dutch were influential in this regard and the work of Emmy van Leersum and Gijs Bakker pioneered a "highly inventive period" in the golden years of creativity (Dormer & Turner 1985:9).

My own interest in the body-object relationship partly began with the introduction to Gijs Bakker's work. During the mid-1960s Contemporary jewellers Gijs Bakker and Emmy van Leersum both decided on breaking from traditional goldsmith practices and pursue more inventive approaches to body adornment, both in terms of design as well as material usage (Dormer and Turner 1985:9). Although their initial pieces comprised aluminium, a lightweight metal, the focus on emphasising body parts through geometrical shapes was an intriguing approach, not because delineating the body as shape was unique, but the size of the pieces were dramatic. Although Bakker and van Leersum were equally involved in this avant-garde approach to jewellery, Bakker is projected as the design mind behind the pieces I find visually and conceptually inspirational to this research.

Antje von Graevenitz (2009) explains an understanding of Bakker's approach to jewellery where the combination of the wearer and the jewel<sup>6</sup> is granted significance similar to conventional art by describing the synthesis as *Bildleib* (translated as "image-body"). This word infers that the jewellery object blends the figurative association of artistic expression

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<sup>6</sup> Note that the jewel/adornment described in this context is created with a specific message in mind and therefore differs from conventional representations of jewellery.

and the literal wearable function of the jewel through observing the object on a body. Thus the art work is the body with the jewel rather than the object on its own. The body is therefore very significant to the brand of contemporary jewellery affiliated with Bakker. "Image" - adopted here from the description of "image-body" - is found in the various materials used in creating Bakker's pieces. Even though he had received traditional goldsmith training, his jewellery pieces differ significantly in terms of the conventional use of precious metals since he chose to use aluminium and printed images for jewellery (von Graevenitz 2009:14).

The use of visual puns with regard to the body in most of the work is a primary focus in this section.

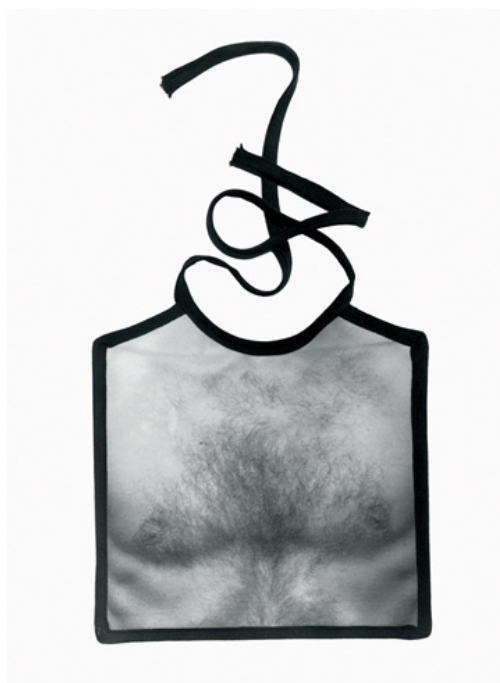


Figure 2.1. Gijs Bakker, *Bib* (1976). Linen, Cotton (Conceptual Jewellery, 1973 – 1985 s.a. [Online])

The piece *Bib* (1976) depicts a photographic image of a naked chest printed on a fabric swatch made to be worn as a neckpiece. Here the visual pun is evident. The quaint effect of the image on the adornment representing the part of the body being hidden by it, reflects an interesting relationship between body and object. This is an aspect which is lost in most commercial jewellery; this is the type of 'conversation' mentioned earlier between an object of adornment and the body.



There is a logical argument that this type of relationship cannot easily be achieved with the technical and financial restraints of precious metals and this further highlights the significant contribution that contemporary jewellery makes to the jewellery discourse.



Figure 2.2. Gijs Bakker, Embrace Necklace (1982). B/W Photo, PVC (Conceptual Jewellery, 1973 – 1985 s.a. [Online])

Figure 2.2, Embrace Necklace (1982) is an equally significant piece since it depicts a physical action conventionally associated with affection. The act of hugging represents affection in a more immediate, tactile sense than a heart or locket-shaped pendant. The added factor here is the link to photography and the 'capturing' of a moment which provides the piece with added significance since customisation could be incorporated in the design. Here customisation is applied when an individual is photographed and the resulting image is transformed into a necklace which has a significant, emotional relationship with the wearer. This context amplifies the emotional value invested into the piece.

Although the insight gained in contemplating these works acted as an incentive to do further research on the body-object relationship, it was the more experimental work where the physical form of the body is modified, that aided the development of this research topic.

The fact that jewellery can become a point of intervention on the body and at times provide an interesting perspective by modifying it to a point where the distinction between body and object becomes blurred and the actual shape of the body is modified, has provided the context in which to reconsider how the shape of the body is observed and classified.



Figure 2.3. Gijs Bakker, Profile Ornament for Emmy van Leersum (1974). Stainless Steel (Conceptual Jewellery, 1973 – 1985 s.a. [Online])

The piece in Figure 2.3, Profile Ornament for Emmy van Leersum (1974) is structured in a way that literally traces the silhouette of the wearer's face. The solid appearance of the metal acts as both a direct translation of her profile like a frame and is also described as being "like a tailor-made muzzle" (von Graevenitz 2000:42). Framing the face is an appropriate description since it traces the contours of the face whilst also representing the restrictive function of a metal jewel attached this close to the body. This frame analogy can also be applied to the image of Clothing Suggestions (1970) in Figure 2.4.



Figure 2.4. Gijs Bakker, Clothing Suggestions (1970). Polyester, Nylon, Cork, Plastic, Wood  
(Conceptual Jewellery, 1973 – 1985 s.a. [Online])

In this image (Figure 2.4) the pieces have a different body relationship to that of the profile ornament. The solid structures which cause spiral mutations in the shapes of the wearers could be read as both part of the clothes but also as probable representations of non-normative silhouettes. Figure 2.3 provides a literal trace of the human face and the created object acts as a marker of the wearer's profile. Figure 2.4 is an exaggeration of the human form and the presence of a fabric covering enhances this theatrical feature to the adornment. Note also that the rings frame the joints of the body in Figure 2.4 and contrast the restrictive description of Figure 2.3 as it emphasises the points of articulation in the body and is aimed at 'pre-empting' a movement (von Graevenitz 2000:17). Both visual examples place strong focus on certain parts of the body but represent two very distinct relationships to the objects of adornment one literally copies, the other exaggerates. This dichotomy is a source of inspiration throughout this research with respect to fat.

Where Bakker's work pushed a boundary by having the body become an integral part of the adornment, Nanna Melland very explicitly used bodily substances as adornment. This trait of Melland's work provided me with an example of the use of abjection as a viable feature in contemporary jewellery. Abjection in this context refers to body matter which is

extracted from the 'safe/sterile' enclosure of the internal body and displayed - in its raw state - outside the body.

Nanna Melland, a Norwegian contemporary jeweller, produced work relating very explicitly to the heart during her period of study at the Munich Academy of Art.<sup>7</sup> Her intention was to produce heart jewellery which "differ from the traditional romantic gold heart" and she incorporated a literal heart, as well as fragments thereof, in her jewellery (Melland 2005:2843). The most striking and impressionable of these pieces is Heart charm (2000) presented in Figure 2.5. It is interesting how the abject matter of a literal heart can become an emotive device. In engaging with the abject, the literal incorporation of a pig's heart strips the emotive symbol of its sentimentality. The raw aesthetic of the fleshy, bodily matter prompts thoughts about the ephemeral nature of the body and reminds us of the reality that it is an actual organ of the body. The symbol of the heart is tainted by the 'real' and its validity as the locus of our emotions is vividly presented as idealistic.

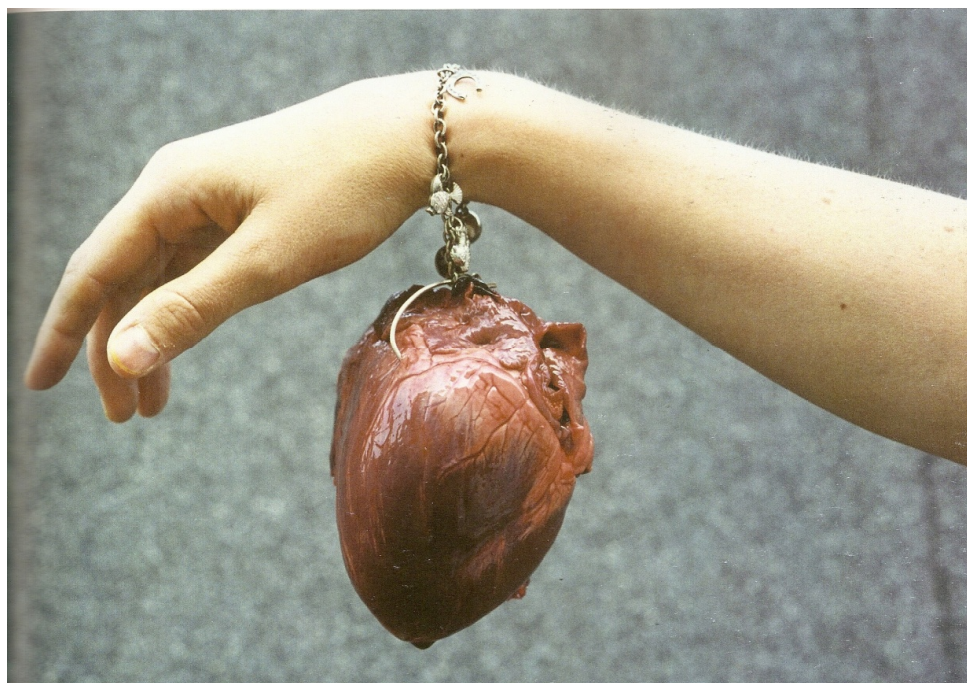


Figure 2.5. Nanna Melland, Heart Charm (2000). Silver charm bracelet and pig's heart (Grant 2005:73)

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<sup>7</sup> This period is understood to have taken place from 2001 up to and including the date of publication, 2005, of the article from which this information has been sourced.

Through Bakker's work I had adopted a vision of jewellery that is better described as existing within an expanded field<sup>8</sup> where the body need not only act as a surface to be decorated but becomes an indispensable part of the adornment and whether worn or separate, each speaks to and of the other. Visually punning the body (as demonstrated by Bakker) is one way of interpreting this relationship but Melland uses a more direct approach and incorporates the use of actual body matter in her work.

Bakker's engagement with the shape of the body and Melland's use of literal object organs provide a frame for my concern with body fat as source for my adornment - a concern that will be resumed in Chapter 3.

## 2.2 The gaze

Since the body and concepts thereof play a major role in contemporary jewellery practice, the spectator's expected response to the spectacle of the body must be considered. Spectacle here refers to a manner of observation where onlookers are prompted to gaze intently at an object which in the context of this study, is the display of a non-normative body/feature (Sturken & Cartwright 2001:72). In this regard I investigate the concept of the gaze. The psychology of the gaze is complex and the intention in this section is to open up a discussion but not to delve too deeply into this theoretically dense and variable concept.<sup>9</sup> My understanding of the gaze was formulated through Norman Bryson's essay titled "The Gaze" (1988:87-108). Bryson describes Sartre's explanation of the gaze through his "story or scenario of the watcher in the park" (1988:88).

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<sup>8</sup> Perceiving jewellery in an expanded field describes the consideration of alternative formats in both the designing and wearing of body adornment. A jewel therefore not only comprises precious materials and does not have to be worn in a conventional style; such as around the neck or arm. Jewels can be created from organic matter such as Nanna Melland's Heart Charm (2000) and be worn as a body piece which in the case of Gijs Bakker's Profile Ornament for Emmy van Leersum (1970) is more convincing as a mask than jewellery. Both these examples provoke ideas of a body-object relationship which provide more significance to the wearer than just decoration.

<sup>9</sup> Slavoj Žižek's book titled; Looking Awry: an introduction to Jacques Lacan through popular culture (1991) acted as my first reference into understanding the concept of the gaze. However, the complexity of his writing about the topic proved to deviate significantly from my original premise as Žižek's approach was from a purely psycho-analytic standpoint. Instead I have opted for a more direct interpretation of the gaze, as is usually employed in visual studies.



Sartre proposes that a subject (initially alone in a park), has his/her unchallenged view interrupted by the entrance of another individual. This interruption disturbs the subject in the sense that he/she is no longer the centre of his/her own field of vision since another individual exists in the same time and space as he/she does. Prior to the interruption, the centre of the visual field is marked by the subject where 'perspective lines' diverge from his/her point of vision. In the second account, where another person disrupts the scenario, these 'perspective lines' converge on the second individual thus making his/her line of sight another centre of the visual field (Bryson 1988:88-91). In my understanding of Sartre's account, the gaze which the initial subject exacted on his/her environment is the same as the one being exacted upon him/her when the second individual enters the park. This realisation contributes to the definition of the gaze where the subject has a profound sense of 'loss' of control when he/she is made aware of the gaze of the other being practised on him/her. The authority associated with being the centre of the visual field is lost.

The realisation that, in the act of looking, the gaze is returned is crucial. What it contributes is the understanding that whether we are aware of it or not, there is a type of gaze being exacted on 'us', which decentres us as authorities. The subject cannot view an imaged object without acknowledging the sense that the object is 'looking back'. This understanding is best expressed by Slavoj Žižek (1991:125) who explains:

The gaze marks the point in the object (in the picture) from which the subject viewing it is already gazed at, i.e., it is the object that is gazing at me. Far from assuring the self-presence of the subject and his vision, the gaze functions thus as a stain, a spot in the picture disturbing its transparent visibility and introducing an irreversible split in my relation to the picture: I can never see the picture at the point from which it is gazing at me, i.e., the eye and the gaze are constitutively asymmetrical. The gaze as object is a stain preventing me from looking at the picture from a safe, "objective" distance, from enframing it as something that is at my grasping view's disposal. The gaze is, so to speak, a point at which the very frame (of my view) is already inscribed in the "content" of the picture viewed.

The subject therefore adopts the role of a spectator since the object viewed, in the case of the images which follow, aim to manipulate a perception. What is meant by manipulation is that in spectatorship theory, the viewer is an abstraction conforming to pre-set reactions formulated by the 'authorities' introducing the spectacle. There is in other words a 'set' idea of the impressions received by the anticipated audience viewing the spectacle. It should be

noted though that the 'set' idea constitutes an ideal response but does not rule out the existence of variable reactions to the spectacle in question, this being a result of the spectator being regarded as an abstraction.

### 2.3 Obesity as spectacle

The above explanation of the concept of the gaze implies that the phenomenon of the spectacle can be applied to images of obese body types.

The condition of obesity is often seen as a kind of 'disease', not always restricted to a certain genetic grouping but most frequently developed from a "simple equation of input and output" (Badger 2010:137). Excessive eating is often regarded as the base cause of the condition, the suffering from which results in yet further complications in terms of health risks such as cardiovascular illnesses and diabetes. Each of these complications, in turn, contributes to the body's inability to perform normal biological functions since excessive fat in the system is not being worked out by way of physical exercise (Gomez 2010:92).

Obesity as an illness is regarded as undesirable predominantly because of the negative associations attributed to a body with excess fat. The media, it can be argued, presents society with images 'dictating' what is to be understood as the ideal body. This ideal body is often one which lacks visible signs of excessive fat and engenders sexual appeal by way of emphasising health consciousness. The impression that is engineered is that the healthy, svelte exterior of the body implies a 'better' person inside by referring almost explicitly to personality. The body is perceived as a tool, one through which we exact authority and manipulate impressions, since "when we think about how bodies become objects of disgust, we come to see how disgust is crucial to power relations and how becoming an abject body is all about the powerful role disgust has in the 'hierarchising [sic.] of spaces as well as bodies'" (Ahmed cited in Ettorre 2010:13).

The gaze therefore plays a crucial role in reading the imagery of various bodies, but it is not only the concept of the gaze which is active in creating the hierarchy that Ahmed highlights. There is also an underlying concept which proves to be very influential in this specific

context, namely that of 'biopower'. The definition of biopower provided in this research is appropriated to the context within which it is used, though there are two different contexts in which the term can be employed, namely health consciousness vs. idealised emaciated bodies.

The inference that there are existing authorities on the representation and maintenance of the body is an understanding which evokes the concept of biopower. According to the description provided by Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, 'biopower' is a term coined by Michel Foucault to describe a state that "actively manages, orders and catalogues the properties of the body through social hygiene, public health, education, demography, census-taking and regulating reproductive practices" (2001:97).

I have also considered Michel Foucault's interpretation of the medical gaze. The 'medical gaze' specifically concerns the interaction between a physician and the patient, in which the patient becomes the object of the medical practitioner's gaze. The subjectivity of the patient is disregarded and the body and its illness are perceived as an independent entity, i.e. an object, in a way that is similar to the dissociation with which the imaged bodies to follow are treated. This deduction is best articulated in a quotation by Michel Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic*:

One can, therefore, as an initial approximation, define this clinical gaze as a perceptual act sustained by a logic of operations; it is analytic because it restores the genesis of composition; but it is pure of all intervention insofar as this genesis is only the syntax of the language spoken by things themselves in an original silence (1973:109).

Although the medical gaze could be applied in the discussion of obese body types, it is not focused on in the broader context of this study.

The members of a 'Western audience' are conditioned through biopower to think about their bodies in a particular way. Thus the transformation of the obese body into spectacle calls for examination. According to Sturken and Cartwright (2001:73); "Spectatorship theory emphasizes the role of the psyche - particularly the unconscious, desire, and fantasy - in the practice of looking". Furthermore, "when psychoanalytic theory talks of the spectator, it treats it as an 'ideal subject'. In using this term, psychoanalytic theory abstracts from real



audience members and the experience ... to refer instead to a construction". My use of the term spectator conforms to this reading and I apply it explicitly to the reactions dealt with in viewing 'headless fatties' in Figures 2.6 and 2.7.

As spectators to the spectacle of an overweight body type, the proposed ideal reaction would be to consider the overweight body as a sign of ill health and ill-discipline. This reaction is only possible because the dichotomy of 'good' and 'bad' are established in the visual field, where the 'good body' is represented by a fit and healthy body type and the 'bad body' as the converse. Furthermore, the gaze experienced by the spectator is not explicit in the case of biopower. Instead there is an implied gaze; one of a surveying nature which can easily be mistaken for the 'conscience' of the spectator. This implied gaze is what encourages the reactions promoted by 'authorities' where a non-normative body type, like the obese, is reacted to in a negative way. Thus, there exists a sense of paranoia where subjects feel that their need to practice knowledge gained about the 'ideal body' places them under constant surveillance.

I would like to insert here that the concept of panopticism had been considered, although not explicitly incorporated into this thesis. This consideration evolved through the interpretation of an implied inspecting gaze, where individuals are ignorant as to whether they are being directly observed, yet maintain a certain ethic about their body maintenance. Foucault borrowed this term from the criminologist Bentham's panopticon (Macey 2000. Sv. 'panopticism'), a prison design in which prisoners are given the impression that they are constantly being surveyed, since they cannot see into the central tower from which they may be observed.

One of the most effective methods in promoting certain ideal body types can be found in visual representations, most often the kind that features on various sites or blogs on the internet or more commonly in magazines – all of which are examples of how biopower is exercised.

In sifting through images on the internet, I came across many images which focus on obesity. What is interesting is that these images are often presented in a different format

from most other depictions of individuals. The morbidly obese, in particular, are often (although not in all cases) depicted as “headless with a focus on the torso and from below in a manner referred to as ‘headless fatties’” (Cooper cited in Badger 2010:145). This tactic is aimed at conditioning the viewer to focus on the physical structure of the body and is not necessarily a personal victimisation of the imaged individual. However, the stripping away of the face with its individuating features also strips these obese subjects of their subjectivity, rendering them mere objects.<sup>10</sup>

The following images will be analysed in the light of this observation.



Figure 2.6. Tony Alter, *Epidemic* (2009). Digital photo. Tobyotter’s photostream (Alter s.a. *Epidemic* [Online])

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<sup>10</sup> The clinical analysis of a patient in order to make a medical judgement is likened to the relationship, proposed by the gaze, enacted by viewers of Figures 2.6 and 2.7. The fact that it is an individual being photographed as representative of obesity is overlooked. The imagery becomes an object to an audience dispensing opinions and advice on a healthy or unhealthy lifestyle and it can thus be judged with impunity which conforms aptly to my understanding of biopower.



Figure 2.7. Tony Alter, Full-Figured Man (2009). Digital photo. Tobyotter's photostream (Alter 2009. Full-Figured Man [Online])

Of the images yielded when the words 'obese' and 'fat' are used as keywords on the internet, these selected photos of photographer Tony Alter occur quite frequently. It is also to be noted that these images - particularly Figure 2.7 are used in articles which appear both on the internet and in public newspapers, yet another form of establishing biopower over the public.

It is interesting that the photographer represents both sexes in his photostream.<sup>11</sup> Visually, the obese body of both males and females show very little difference since it is my opinion that in cases of extreme or morbid obesity both genders carry excess weight in the same regions of the body. In such cases it is not easy to discern whether the body is male or female without the presence of a head. This particular circumstance successfully indicates the way a morbidly obese body is represented. Although the sex of the body shown is specified, the fat in both images is the primary focus.

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<sup>11</sup> Photostream refers to a catalogue of images associated with a particular photographer or theme on the internet site flicker.com.

In Figure 2.6 the body is not only presented as overweight; the person also holds a lit cigarette (Alter 2009) which is yet another indicator of bad health and poor lifestyle choice. Biopower as a psychological tactic is thus proven to be working since the caption, "Epidemic", accompanies the image. Furthermore, the photographer, Tony Alter, admits in the same caption that he is also "fat so I have little room to talk, and I am not being judgemental" (2009). The implied gaze being prompted through observing images of 'bad' body types can be seen in this comment. Alter acknowledges his physique as conforming to the 'undesirable' body type as promoted through the health consciousness context of biopower and therefore stands in between observing the spectacle of the obese body and also conforming to that medical classification. This circumstance displays the reverse side of biopower and lends subjectivity to the objectified subject in the spectacle through Alter's apologetic comment.

Another factor to consider when looking at images via the internet would be the concept of 'voyeurism'. Comments passed in and below the captions accompanying images like Figures 2.6 and 2.7 are made by individuals who possess anonymity on internet websites. Apart from this, one can easily type in specific descriptions of bodily qualities with the comfort of knowing that one could gaze at the images "while not being seen" (Sturken & Cartwright 2001:76). What the concept of voyeurism also contributes is a sense of 'power' held over the content of the images. The internet provides an ideal setting for this activity since anyone accessing images can easily be made to feel like an authority. The implied hierarchy is enacted when words of a specific nature are typed into the search bar and a mere press of the 'Enter' key lays out numerous options for the viewer.

So far it has been considered that the obese body and spectacle can be understood in terms of biopower, a concept relating to health issues. Yet the act of looking is not restricted to health judgements but can also be a source of delight or attraction. Voyeurism is the term frequently employed to discuss representations of sexualised (obese) bodies.

Sexualisation of objects stimulates the voyeur<sup>12</sup> in a viewer since sexual desire is provoked. The development of this relationship, as explained with respect to visual media, is best described by McGowan (2007:6):

The gaze compels our look because it appears to offer access to the unseen, to the reverse side of the visible. It promises the subject the secret of the Other, but this secret exists only insofar as it remains hidden. The subject cannot uncover the secret of the gaze, and yet it marks the point at which the visual field takes the subject's desire into account. The only satisfaction available to the subject consists in following the path (which psychoanalysis calls the drive) through which it encircles this privileged object.

Regarding an obese body as a sexual object may be exceptional but is a form of fetishism particularly relevant to the development of this research.

Spectacle, as described earlier, loosely relates to desire and fantasy and therefore sexualised representations are of interest to spectatorship theory. Furthermore, the gaze implies that the viewer is not at the centre of his/her field of vision and therefore possesses no real power when confronted with the gaze of the other.

The loss of power felt by the viewer along with the sensationalism of the image become the very features which draw attention. The 'compulsion' to observe the non-normative through spectacle can also provide viewers of such images with a mixture of ambivalent feelings. Feelings of both attraction and repulsion confirm a psychoanalytic reading of the power that repressed content in the subconscious can have in generating ambivalent responses in the viewer.

It can be concluded that the gaze, although representing a relationship between the objectified image of excessive fat and the subject (the viewer), can be altered to an extent depending on the context within which the image is placed, and also the motive with which the viewer observes the image. Fat is a sensitive issue and discussing it with respect to varying perceptions can prove to be a complex and delicate process.

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<sup>12</sup> According to Sturken and Cartwright, the full description of voyeurism is set as: "the pleasure in looking while not being seen, and carries a more negative connotation of a powerful, if not sadistic, position" (2001:76) Consequently, the individual active in this visual hierarchy is then described as a 'voyeur'.



This section has considered the gaze and the specific relationship it implies between spectacle and spectator. Spectatorship theory relies heavily on the concept of the gaze and in turn generates other further concepts such as biopower and voyeurism. Each of these concepts is therefore relevant when formulating an understanding of obesity and representations of fat, and in the case of my own work, fat as a form of adornment.

The link I draw between the aforementioned concepts in looking at the body as well as the relationship between the body and jewellery can be understood in two parts. The first relates to biopower. Notions of health discourses often surface when non-normative body types are projected. In such an instance 'fat' would most likely prompt thoughts about the relationship of this specific matter to the body. The intention in my practical work is to alter the common negative impression of excessive body fat to a perception which explores its aesthetic appeal. The second relates to voyeurism. Although it is uncommon to find explicit reactions of delight to viewing obese body types, this reaction does occur. It is my intention to elicit the same reaction in viewers of my work by creating body adornment of an aesthetically appealing nature which draws out the voyeur but still speaks of body fat.

To these ends, the work of Lauren Kalman is particularly suitable in developing my own concerns with respect to fat as adornment.

#### 2.4 Lauren Kalman's Spectacular

In this section I review the exhibition Spectacular by the Chicago-based American contemporary artist Lauren Kalman. Although not highlighted in this research, Kalman's work often highlights an approach to the body which is considered unconventional within jewellery practices. Her work projects undesirable elements of the body through the use of precious materials conventionally associated with luxury and fine jewellery and in Spectacular this is realised through the use of a lingerie association (Spectacular an Exhibition by Lauren Kalman at the US Art Gallery 2012).

In Spectacular Kalman manufactures strap-on pieces made of cotton and fabrics conventionally associated with lingerie but that mimic the appearance of diseases, in

particular elephantiasis. Her work transgresses the proposed boundary between the practices of fine art and the contemporary jewellery aesthetic. This transgression is appropriate for my research since it encompasses most of the main concerns highlighted in my thesis thus far. These are: the non-normative body, spectacle in relation to the sexualised, and interrogating the gaze as well as abjection. Whilst reading about Spectacular<sup>13</sup>, I developed an interest in the materials used, the manner of display and the explicit implication that these works 'adorn' the body. Kalman's work strongly relates to the motives and growing development of the contemporary jewellery aesthetics and ethos.

This section of the research deals with both the representation of non-normative depictions of bodily adornment and incorporates the inspiration and motivation from which Kalman's work derived its particular aesthetic. These works all result from regarding the body as a site for modification, intervention and invention of a new, possibly desirable aesthetic.

Kalman describes the Spectacular series:

Spectacular focuses on the creation, documentation, and display of wearable sculpture, electronic adornments, photographs, video, and performance that critique the fashion industry's ability to sexualize the experience of pain, disfigurement, illness, and abnormality, and to promote this sexualization as a desirable aesthetic. Through my work, I will be bringing to light uncomfortable connections in visual culture between body image, media, class, and style.

This work co-opts the image of suffering and supposes to turn that suffering into fashion. The sourcing of the original photographs and videos from the Internet is significant because in that medium suffering often turns into spectacle (Kalman s.a.).

The above observation that "suffering often turns into spectacle" (Kalman s.a.) can be witnessed, as discussed before, in images of obesity. The kinds of physical disability in which the body is very obviously and/or adversely affected, elicit morbid interest when the viewer adopts the role of spectator to observe these deviances and its curious manifestations. The viewer is desensitised since the interest in the illnesses presented is partly informed by health consciousness issues. Therefore there is logic in applying the concept of biopower in this context. Due to the focus on illness, the normalised reaction of the viewer observing an 'ill' body would be to condemn the subject for allowing him/herself to reach this undesirable state.

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<sup>13</sup> From 23 May to 23 June 2012 Lauren Kalman held an exhibition at the Stellenbosch University Art Gallery in Stellenbosch, in which work from the ongoing series Spectacular was displayed.

Kalman also focuses on the fashion industry which has a longstanding tradition parading adorned anorexic bodies along a catwalk; emaciated bodies which are also not examples of 'health consciousness' are presented to the public in idealised ways. It is understood that the clothing which adorn the emaciated bodies are the primary focus yet the body of the 'model' is also significant.<sup>14</sup> I think it is important to mention here that the context of the fashion industry prompts subversion: 'fat' bodies are seen as ill, but emaciated bodies as ideal. Power is practised over the body through the promotion of a svelte figure in the fashion industry and a cult-like following of 'fashionistas' are willing to damage their otherwise healthy bodies to echo this body shape. This situation displays the two different contexts within which biopower is employed namely health consciousness vs. idealised emaciated bodies. Although both contexts are appropriate to the example of the fashion industry, Kalman highlights the unhealthy norms of promoting emaciated bodies as ideal and equates this distorted perception of the body with regarding bodily deformities such as elephantiasis as a normative body type within an alternative perception of the fashion industry context.

Lauren Kalman attended the University of Stellenbosch as a visiting lecturer for a short period in May 2012 during which time she participated in critiques with students in the visual arts. She also prepared for her exhibition in the university's gallery and conducted a short lecture in the Visual Arts Department on her work, with particular focus on the Spectacular series. In this lecture she introduced 'Freak Shows' as one of the sources of inspiration for this series (fashion being the more significant source of inspiration). The incorporation of 'freak shows' was particularly significant because of the fact that the term could aptly be applied to the context of fashion shows. Fashion models parade the catwalk and display their adorned emaciated bodies in the same way that the participants of a freak show are subjected to spectacle. The interest credited to these two contexts is similar since both body types on display are entertained for their non-normative classification.

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<sup>14</sup> It is to be noted that there are fashion shows dedicated to 'Plus-size models' where the emaciated bodies are replaced by curvier female body types who are subjected to the same spectacle.



Fashion models are often subjected to the sexualised gaze. The voyeur is also active in this context and it is assumed that with anonymity, power is afforded to the observer of the spectacle, yet there is a gaze being returned which renders the observer's power ambivalent. This is to say spectatorship does not necessarily afford a powerful position to the observer. According to Sturken and Cartwright (2001:87-88):

The desires that spectators have in looking and being looked at are caught up in relationships of power. Traditionally, this meant that the spectator was always perceived to have more power than the object of the gaze (or person looked at), but the contemporary landscape of images shows that this is not always the case. In contemporary advertising, for instance, the idea of a powerful or disempowering gaze is often the source of a joke or counter gaze.

With this interpretation of the role of a spectator, the fashion model, or spectacle, can easily be understood as also possessing a powerful position on the catwalk. The subject observing the fashion model is decentred since the gaze being returned is best described as the implied gaze active in this context of biopower associated with idealising the emaciated body. The fashion model is therefore positioned at the top of the hierarchy between the ideal body type and the body type of the observer which shifts power to benefit the spectacle (the model) rather than the spectator. Although this exact interpretation of the gaze being returned may possibly not be applied to the freak show, the spectator similarly does not necessarily possess authority over the spectacle. This situation may be due to the subject of a freak show desiring the attention afforded him/her similar to the idea that fashion models desire attention when subjected to spectacle.

The subjects of freak shows are much like patients, suffering from some physical deformity with respect to conventional representations of the human body. Spectators observing the bodies of subjects in freak shows may consider the physical peculiarities nearly impossible to understand or relate to irrespective of how intently the deformities are observed. Here Slavoj Žižek aptly states that "the gaze functions thus as a stain, a spot in the picture disturbing its transparent visibility and introducing an irreversible split in my relation to the picture: I can never see the picture at the point from which it is gazing at me" (1991:125).

This same relationship is experienced when viewing medical patients whose physical deformities are uncommon as everyday visual references. This dissociation conjures up a sense of cognitive dissonance in the viewer, although the concept of voyeurism is equally present.

Cognitive dissonance is described as a psychological state in which an understanding of that which causes discomfort simultaneously evokes feelings of an interested nature, or even of delight. This implied ambiguity can be attributed to “a discrepancy between what you already accept or believe, and being presented with new information or interpretation”. This would result in a “need to accommodate new ideas, and it may be necessary for it to expand upon the information and interpretation so that we can become ‘open’ to these new ideas” (Atherton 2011). In the context of physical deformities, the abject is appropriated since it refers to something we find physically repulsive and which exists outside conventional visual representations of the human body.

I have incorporated cognitive dissonance in the interpretation of the ambiguous relationship experienced when viewing non-normative bodies. One reaction of cognitive dissonance is expressed as interest, not only in the strange manifestation of these non-normative bodies, but also in the delight experienced in viewing such a ‘perversion of nature’. This delight is coupled with the contrary feeling of fear or disgust and is the cause of the ambiguity associated with cognitive dissonance. Where a condition which causes physical deformities is known, hesitation is an expected reaction. The visuals of individuals suffering from elephantiasis commonly stir the hesitant/anxious reaction in observers since this deformity is closely linked to the grotesque body. The focus here is on an understanding of the relationship between spectacle and the condition medically known as elephantiasis.

Elephantiasis (Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary. 1983. Sv. ‘elephantiasis’) is described as:

a chronic disease of the skin characterized by the enlargement of certain parts of the body, especially the legs and genitals, and by the hardening and ulceration of the surrounding skin: it is caused by small threadlike worms (filariae) which obstruct the lymphatic glands.

With respect to the exhibition titled *Spectacular*, Kalman's use and interpretation of elephantiasis will be investigated at length. However, there are certain implications that knowledge about the condition, as expressed in the definition above, would have on viewers' reception of its visual representations.

Elephantiasis may be considered a rare and unconventional disease in contemporary Western society. The disgust experienced in viewing images of the disease differs from that experienced when viewing images of obesity in the sense that an excessively fat body is visible in everyday life as it is a realistic condition faced by a significant percentage of the population. Since exposure to examples of elephantiasis are rare, the only other format through which to view this disease is via medical documentation, television shows, magazine articles and the internet which focus on physiological anomalies even though the latter example may depict the ailments to appeal to fetishist interest and the former may promote overcoming 'unconventional' medical obstacles.

The rarity of physical examples along with the physiological regression of the disease amplifies its association with abjection. The description provided for the development of the disease elephantiasis emphasises growth in specific areas of the body due to a parasitic infection and it is primarily this feature which renders a victim of elephantiasis of a more non-normative body type than an obese individual. The type of 'growth' associated with obese bodies is caused by the expansion of the fat cell in terms of its volume, whereas elephantiasis is caused by a parasitic infection which infiltrates more biological systems than just fat cells. Although each circumstance develops uniquely, both body types fall outside the ambit of a 'healthy' body type and are regarded as abject and being outside of the natural order.

The greater significance of this abject status lies in the exploitative representations of victims of this illness which provoke a looming sense of cognitive dissonance in the viewer, almost always caused by the deformed portions of the body and not by the whole body itself. The deformation occurs on the body of a victim and although being a part of the body, is regarded instead as apart from it.

Here Kalman's creation of body adornment convincingly depicts the understanding gained by describing elephantiasis as apart from the body. Curiously, Kalman adopts the method of veiling the wearers of her pieces with a 'mask' eliminating identity like medical images and the 'headless fatties' described earlier in this chapter (Cooper cited in Badger 2010:145). Furthermore, the digital media (video installation) presented alongside each piece which tracks a circular recording of the adorned subject succinctly references freak show displays. This observation is sourced from Kalman's Spectacular exhibition hosted at the Stellenbosch University Art Gallery in Stellenbosch. This contradictory display of elephantiasis reasserts a sense of cognitive dissonance. Freak shows, much like fashion shows explicitly promote the non-normative/emaciated body type to elicit fantasy. Yet, Kalman's recorded subjects are presented similar to medical subjects, a context which indicates the power structure associated with biopower. Consequently, it is the common discourse of spectacle which resonates with this work and shall be explored further in the images which follow.



Figure 2.8. OG Mason (s.a.). Photograph (Elephanti.jpg s.a. [Online])



Figure 2.9. Lauren Kalman, *Spectacular (legs)* (2011). Video stills (Lauren Kalman s.a. [Online])

Figure 2.8 is an old photograph taken of a victim of elephantiasis. This image served as the ‘inspiration’ for Lauren Kalman’s work in the video still of Figure 2.9.<sup>15</sup> Both images depict the individual with her identity masked by a cloth of black fabric draped over the head. In the case of Figure 2.8, this act is meant to prevent the identity of the subject from being made public. This subtle gesture of concern is considered ironic in Kalman’s image, as the individual in Figure 2.9 is posed in a manner very obviously mimicking that of the first image. This irony is lost when viewers observe only Kalman’s image (Figure 2.9). This is because the image of Figure 2.8 does not appear anywhere in the *Spectacular* exhibition or on the link to this series on her website.

Figure 2.8 objectifies the body and encourages a medical gaze<sup>16</sup> based on the premise that the illness depicted is uncommon knowledge, both to the intended audience of the photograph and at the time (as in date or year) at which this photograph was taken. What converts it into spectacle would be characterised by the public display of the unfortunate victim. The novelty attributed to this image, or spectacle, is based on the understanding that the audience viewing either or both of these images possesses no prior knowledge of

<sup>15</sup> Lauren Kalman displayed these images sequentially (Figure 2.9 and 2.10) in her presentation at the Visual Arts Department of Stellenbosch University on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Refer to page 22 for a description of the medical gaze.

elephantiasis. I propose that the particular interpretation of an image of this nature (Figure 2.8), after the viewer is educated or enlightened about the medical side of elephantiasis, will almost certainly shift upon viewing the sexualised depiction of the illness in Figure 2.9. In this image, Kalman highlights the underlying 'sexual thrill' of the gaze (McGowan 2007:6).

This understanding is made through the wearable piece being attached to the body via a lace-up corset. The corset is interpreted as a signifier of sexuality which invites a desiring gaze. The voyeur is thus considered the ideal viewer of the 'spectacle' presented by Kalman's piece. These few indicators of a sexualised interpretation of an ill body are considered sufficient to transform the reading of this body from disgust to unconventional delight and fantasy.

The impression is also created that a desiring gaze is ethically problematic where the ill body in Figure 2.8 is concerned. The notion of 'ethics' is highlighted by the clasped hands echoed in Kalman's interpretation of Figure 2.8, a demure gesture possibly implying a sense of discomfort or shame. What is unique to Kalman's depiction is also the means of representing this ailment. This observation is made in three parts.

The first part relates to the medium employed in the manufacture of the representation of elephantiasis. Kalman uses fabrics which resemble the ones used in lingerie creation associated with both the fashion industry and voyeurism.<sup>17</sup> This is not an arbitrary choice since the description of this series emphasises that

... the creation, documentation, and display of wearable sculpture, electronic adornments, photographs, video, and performance that critique the fashion industry's ability to sexualize the experience of pain, disfigurement, illness, and abnormality, and to promote this sexualization as a desirable aesthetic (Kalman s.a.).

The second part pertains to the video installation. This video still in Figure 2.9 assists in drawing a visual comparison with the manner of display evident in freak shows. The aim of the display is to objectify the individual with the physical deformity. It is presumed that freak shows not only introduce their audiences to physical deviations, but also give cause to

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<sup>17</sup> Lingerie is easily associated with sexuality since it is garments worn beneath clothes. It is thus hidden from sight. Exposing it espouses the idea of power to the viewer. Power and desire (sexuality) result from the definition of the gaze with respect to voyeurism.

marvel at them. This is enacted in the way that people look and interact with the objectified 'other' who is slowly and precisely observed and examined in an investigative manner. This manner of observation is further articulated by Kalman's video installation, where the individual adorned with the elephantiasis-inspired lingerie is recorded in a stationary position. The recording is tracked in a circular motion of 360 degrees around the standing individual. This action echoes that of the slow and precise observation of a spectator in the act of scrutinising a deformed figure in a freak show.

The third and last part relates to Kalman's motivation for using lingerie, as per her explanatory statement. Lingerie is an item of apparel conventionally aimed at eliciting a sexualised gaze, heightened by fashion shows in which such garments are praised, thus conforming to the description of spectacle. The frivolous, yet fragile design of lingerie is considered appealing and also assumed to 'control' and 'safe guard' the private parts of the body. The exposure of these garments elicits a loss of control and spectacle arises at this point because, as was mentioned earlier, power is conventionally afforded to the spectator. Yet, Kalman chose to exaggerate these garments and in this way exaggerates the sexual connotation of both the garment as well as the body. Being linked to elephantiasis, the exaggeration highlights both illnesses - which could be read to acknowledge the emaciated bodies - as sexualised through fashion and the misconception that the spectator is afforded power when engaged with spectacle. There exists therefore a tenuous relationship between bodies and expected responses in a spectacle. Another example articulating this tension equally successfully can be located in the work presented by Figures 2.10 and 2.11.

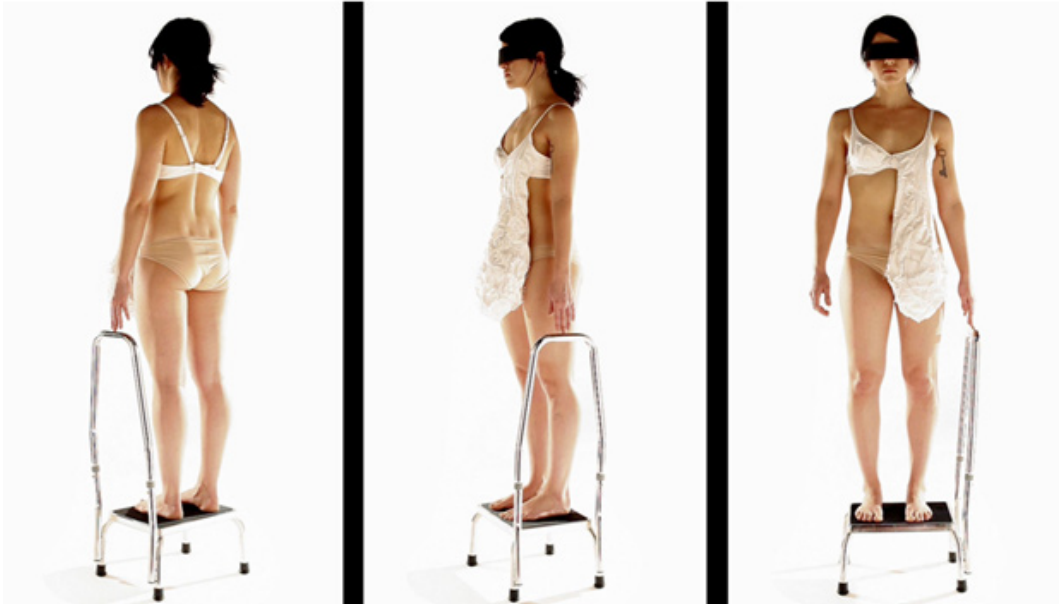


Figure 2.10. Lauren Kalman, Spectacular (tit) (2011). Video stills (Uitstallings/Exhibits s.a. [Online])

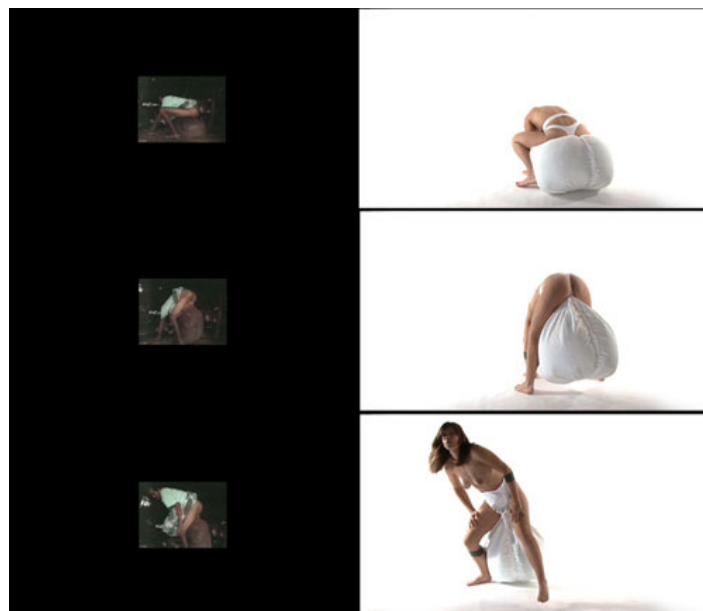


Figure 2.11. Lauren Kalman, Spectacular (balls) (2010). Video stills (Lauren Kalman s.a. [Online])

These images depict spectacle in a tenuous manner, different from the example of Figure 2.9. Figure 2.10 which emphasises an enlarged breast and Figure 2.11 elephantiasis-infected testicles. These depictions of the ailment may result in a sense of repulsion experienced by both sexes, since these areas of the body are regarded as sensitive, not only in its public and graphic presentations, but also in terms of an implied discomfort. This image content is



considered more fragile than Figure 2.9 due to the sensitive issue of explicitly representing socially taboo areas of the female and male bodies, hence the use of the word *tenuous*.

Figure 2.10 is not a common garment in the commercial lingerie industry and the unusual inclusion of straight pins at the base of the abhorrent bra cup is equally curious. Kalman in a personal communication (April 2013) explains:

The pins are used to hold fabric while it is being sewn. I use them to reference fast creation or generation. Literally leaving the object unfinished as the breast deviates further and further from its [sic.] traditional form.

This deviation in the bra design evokes a sense of the spectacle especially where the individual is placed on a pedestal with a video mimicking a spectator's rotational movement. Lingerie as a signifier of sexuality is placed in conflict with a sexualised body, once again evoking contradictory feelings such as described by cognitive dissonance. The fragility of the piece is heightened by the inclusion of pins in a very tender part of the bra cup. The decision to leave this sign on the garment to represent the 'deviation' of the breast encourages thoughts of a breast growing out of proportion encouraged by the context of the illness elephantiasis. In a way, the enlarged breast is interpreted as sexually charged since bigger breasts are seen as a 'stronger' signifier of female sexuality. Hence, cognitive dissonance is evident in the fact that the sexuality of the enlarged breast (seen here as evoking a perverse delight) is peculiarly mixed with the disturbing nature of only one breast being large (seen here to evoke a sense of repulsion) due to elephantiasis being portrayed through the garment.

Figure 2.11 evokes tension because the original video depicting the action of a standing and squatting male is presented alongside Kalman's parody of the elephantiasis infected testicles. The individual in the left column is male and that of the right column is female. Also, the part of the male body being projected is an area that is tacitly taboo to 'air' in public. A further conflicting aspect to the sartorial adornment (which references the male body) is the actual wearer of the piece (who is female). In personal correspondence Kalman (April 2013) states:

Briefly it deals with gender identity and its [sic.]relation to power as with the common saying "he's got (big) balls" here (big) balls is equates [sic.] with courage, probably originating from a cultural connection between courage and testosterone. I

was interested in what happens when the balls grow beyond a sexual organ and how the meaning might be different when placed on the female body. Though I am not opposed to having the objects be worn by males.

Magnifying the sexual organ of the body within the context of this body of work could be interpreted in two ways. Courage is presented as a strictly male characteristic since none of the previous examples of elephantiasis-infected parts of the female bodies have as strong a link to courage as represented by testosterone and testicles, though the act of willingly being photographed as a medical study requires courage, this quality is attributed to males. Although the wearer of Kalman's piece is female (Figure 2.11), this decision is incidental even though it appears to aptly challenge the male 'dominated' interpretation of the word courage in this context. Furthermore, the infected organ is presented as a sequential representation in contrast to the static imagery of the previous examples. Here a video records the garment in the same rotational manner as before, however, the figure is not stationary. This very important difference is reflected in the quotation "men act, women appear" (Berger cited in Sturken & Cartwright 2001:81) bringing about strong links to gender discourse especially with regard to the gaze.<sup>18</sup> The male is seen as 'practically' infected with elephantiasis whereas the females are seen as just physically infected. A further curious aspect would be that the enlarged breast of Figure 2.10 suggests a stronger sexual charge, yet this same association is not as convincing with the testicles. Rather, courage, an admirable attribute but not necessarily a sexually charged one, is emphasised.

It is with these considerations in mind that the inclusion of a female wearer is seen as a curious decision. The sartorial adornment confers tension when the female wearer acquires the attribute 'courageous' through enlarged testicles. This is further established in the echoing of standing and sitting. The original video indicates the male as 'practically' infected yet in Kalman's parody this active role is replaced by a female. Furthermore, since it is a female wearer and the adornment has a strong link to lingerie, the provocative feature is rendered significant even though an impression of 'sexual dominance' is also present.

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<sup>18</sup> Please note, even though this quotation is considered relevant, it is not the intention of this research to focus on gender studies.

Kalman's Spectacular series represents tension between a desiring gaze and one which elicits repulsion. This along with a focus on perversion supports my own motives for working with body matter such as fat.

## 2.5 Chapter summary

Throughout this chapter, emphasis has been placed on the significance in understanding the discourses related to the gaze with respect to the body as well as body adornment.

Firstly, contemporary jewellery was discussed in relation to the growing focus on the body-object relationship. It was established that the incorporation of the body in both a literal context as well as through visual puns provides a more integrated understanding of adornment. This understanding proceeded to highlight the significance of how the body is observed. At this point the gaze was introduced as a relationship which exists between the subject and the object. Further research proved that various types of the gaze are capable of being enacted between subject and object with the more significant one being spectacle, especially when concerned with the body. It is through the lens of spectacle that the work of Lauren Kalman can be analysed. The relevance of incorporating work of this nature is to emphasise the attraction and simultaneous repulsion which exist between viewers and spectacle, with a strong focus on the abject body.

My own interest in the abject body is formed through representations of fat as body matter, with a focus on obesity. It is my opinion that, with the backing provided by the theory discussed thus far, representations of body fat can have an aesthetic appeal when crafted as a type of adornment.

The following chapter accommodates this concern by opening a discussion about the commodification of the body through cosmetic surgery.

## Chapter 3: Cosmetic surgery and the body as a commodity

In the previous chapter, it was made clear that the body-object relationship is very complex in contemporary jewellery discourse and is evident in the use of Lauren Kalman's series *Spectacular* which was analysed for its focus on critiquing the emaciated bodies of the fashion industry, a context which highlights the 'purchase' of an idealised body type.

In this chapter I investigate the commodification of the body and the implications this has for contemporary jewellery. I propose that the demand for the body beautiful has generated a flourishing industry focusing on products designed to supply a growing commercial field and that plastic surgery with its promise of infinite body modification, is influencing the way artists look at the human body. Examples are the work of Christoph Zellweger and Norman Cherry who are inspired by surgical procedures to modify the human body and treat the body itself as a piece of jewellery; the distinction between the matter of the body and jewellery as object is done away with altogether. This, I argue, has relevance for my own practice since I also blur the boundaries between body and adornment by using body fat as inspiration for my work.

### 3.1 Commodification

This section focuses on the commodification of the body, with the intention of clarifying how the human body has become not only a source for marketing but also a marketable, saleable 'product'.

In popular culture, imagery of celebrities and influential individuals are projected as either physical or ideological ideals by the media which presents these figures as iconic. Within this context, the promotion of practices such as plastic surgery<sup>19</sup> in order to emulate these ideal figures can be understood as objectifying the human body and rendering it a commodity

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<sup>19</sup> Plastic surgery as it is used in this context refers to the cosmetic operations employed in performing reconstructions on willing participants in order to acquire a result (medically) which conforms to the aesthetic that the patient (willing participant) desires in emulation of presumably desirable facial and bodily features.

(Gimlin 2000:80). This assertion however can be problematic since interpreting the body as a commodity implies that the body is 'separate' from the identity of an individual. Bryn Williams-Jones comments that this understanding is fuelled by "Cartesian Dualism" which "has strongly influenced the development of modern Western medicine" and further explains, "this separation also allows for the objectification and commodification of the body, for it implies that the body and its parts may be treated like other possessions" (1999:11).

Plastic surgery was originally developed to mend the body; this is the case, for example, in forms of skin grafting where an individual had been very badly scarred in an accident or by fire. It is only in recent years that this method of alteration has increased in popularity as a primary means of custom-designing bodies (Gimlin 2000:78). Conventionally, the operations entail either the adding or subtracting of bodily or other matter. I consider this addition/subtraction dichotomy to be an apt link to economic structures and in this way a good example of commodity transaction. In the case of a damaged body, the operation is considered ennobling while opposite reactions are elicited by modifying an already healthy body through plastic surgery. Here the materialistic concerns which often motivate plastic surgery are considered significant. Williams-Jones mentions that the dualistic concept is replaced by a materialistic one where the whole body is objectified rather than only a part of it for the sake of medical intervention (1999). Both aforementioned concepts emphasise the commodification of the body as becoming a 'site' upon which ideologies for 'consumer' modifications are realised.

The term 'commodity' is defined in Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (1983. Sv. 'commodity') as "any article that is bought and sold". It may appear to be insensitive to refer to the entire human body as a commodity, yet this has been an accepted notion for centuries. Slaves could have been regarded as products to be bartered for money or services and, more recently, organs, limbs, and body matter have been commodified in a similar way. This process is partly reinforced by the understanding that commodities are 'things' which possess a 'use-value' and with regard to human body parts and organs;

... a process of objectification or reification is required, in which it is first necessary mentally or physically to separate the materials from the body so that they may

become objects. Once objectified, as Appadurai (1986) has pointed out, a body part may have a social life as a thing and, ultimately, as a commodity. Objectification, though, causes tension between the status of body parts as 'self' or 'not self' (Seale, Cavers & Dixon-Woods 2006:26).

The tension mentioned here is particularly significant with regard to the medical procedures involving transplanted organs where the procedure is deemed necessary for survival but the organ has no biological affiliation to the body of the recipient. Given that the compatibility of blood types is important in such an operation, there is the potential that the recipients' body may reject the organ, placing the victim of this circumstance in a position of need once again. This situation brings to mind another important factor to consider regarding medical procedures and the body, emotional attachment.

The human element in surgery is often overlooked due to the medical necessity of certain procedures. Yet, desire for life – or more specifically the desire for a certain body type – is fundamental to considering the body as a commodity. Recipients of organs and limbs 'purchase' an extension of their physiological functions whereas elective surgery patients 'purchase' ideal bodies. The emotional complexities involved in accepting a physical change to the body can become quite complex since the notion of the 'self' is significantly tied to the physiological structure of the body. The emotionally fuelled concerns highlighted foreground elective/cosmetic surgeries as a materialistic decision (Scheper-Hughes 2001:2).

This understanding bears very close ties to the evaluation of jewellery. Meaning is imbued in an object of adornment and yet the object is sold and bought like any other commodity. In a similar way, when an ideal body is bought, the processes involved in the transaction require a cosmetic surgeon but in the end it is the physical body which is the commodity. Debra Gimlin (2000:80) expresses this understanding very appropriately:

Not only has the body come to stand as a primary symbol of identity, but it is a symbol whose capacity for alteration and modification is understood to be unlimited. The body, instead of a dysfunctional object requiring medical intervention, becomes a commodity, not unlike "a car, a refrigerator, a house, which can be continuously upgraded and modified in accordance with new interests and greater resources" (Finkelstein 1991, p. 87). The body is a symbol of selfhood, but its relation to its inhabitant is shaped primarily by the individual's capacity for material consumption.

Elective or cosmetic surgery is a tool to create the ideal body type which most recipients of this process feel provides them with the desired receptacle for their personalities and identities.

The following section considers this understanding by exploring the impact and methods cosmetic surgery employs as a means of enhancing the body and further representing the body as a commodity.

### 3.2 The influence of cosmetic surgery

Cosmetic surgery is an area of extreme physical alteration that not many people would be keen to attempt. This section considers this method of physical alteration as immediate solution to bodily 'flaws' and also the fact that, in this process, the body becomes a commodity or object of adornment. This is to say, invasive surgical enhancements pacify the desire for an 'ideal' body which is often based on an artificial template in comparison to a 'normal' body type.

As mentioned earlier, the source of inspiration for undergoing cosmetic surgery can be located in popular culture imagery. In the projections of famous individuals, the inference is made that the 'fuss' surrounding these individuals can be attributed to their svelte body types. It is my understanding that this situation is an example of 'biopower' as was mentioned in Chapter 2. Instead of presenting the healthy body as an ideal type to mimic, here certain proportions are 'standardised' as indicators of fame, fortune and social success. The power of social standing is not something to be underestimated and could be considered the motivation for many elective surgeries.

The correlation between the 'perfect or beautiful' body type and a 'desirable' personality is so closely linked it is assumed when the idealised body is acquired, the 'desirable' personality would automatically accompany it. This is complicated since, for the most part, "the commercial character of cosmetic surgery seems to sever the relationship between an inner state and its outer expression in physical appearance" (Gimlin 2000:81). The assumption is that through exercise, not only the body, but also the personality is improved,

and that this result is achieved through hard work. The short-cut method through cosmetic surgery, however, results in some recipients feeling cheated since “women who undergo plastic surgery must work even harder to reattach their identities to their new appearances” (Gimlin 2000:81).

The ideal body is therefore something which is purchased and cosmetic surgery is the method by which this result is achieved. The assumption is that this purchased physical desirability is then accompanied by an idealised one. Here the notion of ‘embodiment’ goes further by predisposing an abstract value on something which is artificially added to the body. This description bears similarity to jewellery adornment, however, the result is far more permanent.

The ideal body is not only achieved through additions made to it but also subtractions. Here the procedure of liposuction is relevant since it is one of the more common cosmetic operations conducted on the human body. The reason for having liposuction done is often because the patient feels that no other method of eliminating excessive fat has proven successful (Gimlin 2000:78). It is also seen as the only way of eliminating a body flaw which is genetically coded in the body of the patient. The defeatist tone of this motivation does not shed a positive light on the practice of cosmetic surgery as Debra Gimlin (2000:78) explains:

... moreover, plastic surgery is perceived by its critics as an activity that is somehow qualitatively different from other efforts at altering the body (including aerobics, hairstyling, or even dieting) in that it is an activity so extreme, so invasive, that it leaves no space for interpretation as anything but subjugation.

The motivation for plastic surgery as a method to correct bodily flaws may seem like subjugation, yet it is a guaranteed way of acquiring the desired body type (should the procedure be successful). Even though liposuction does not make the body look ‘fake’ it is still thought of as an invasive procedure where fat is lost in dramatic quantities. A better example of a ‘fake’ body would be where artificial substances are added to the body creating an ‘unusual’ silhouette. An example of this is implanting silicone-based matter for the purpose of aesthetic appeal. Another example is the reinsertion of fat, removed from



one area of the body, in another area to create volume (Nordqvist 2009). This engineering of the body, I argue, is a kind of adornment akin to jewellery.

According to Christian Nordqvist (2009):

Breast enlargement ... is one of the most common procedures in cosmetic surgery. This is done either with fat grafting, or with saline or silicone gel prosthetics. Usually carried out because the woman feels her breasts are too small (micromastia), but also if one breast is larger than the other, or if the breasts have changed after pregnancy and/or breastfeeding.

Of interest in this quotation is the substance used in creating the volume. Saline and silicone are two chemically sourced products which are added to the patient's body. Although medical opinion often motivates against the use of silicone, its advocates maintain that it has a consistency similar to that of breast tissue. The product is however prone to potential leaking which can cause significant damage to a patient's body. Describing the material as similar to breast tissue is a clever manipulation to validate this artificial commodity. The artificial process of undergoing this physical alteration is therefore ignored even though the operation could be likened to a commodity transaction.

Having silicone implanted in the body is conventionally associated with rendering the body beautiful and more desirable. Yet, the artist Orlan interpreted this in a very unconventional manner.

Orlan is a French artist whose main concern with regard to her art practice is to investigate "modern conceptions of identity and the self" (Zugazagoitia 2004:215). Her explorations of these concerns during the early 1990s lead to her coining the term "carnal art" which refers explicitly to the physical manipulation of the human body. Through a series of surgical operations, she 'redesigned' her face in order to 'denaturalise' the beauty ideal (Figure 3.1 Orlan before surgery). In a book dedicated to the artist's work, the process is described as follows:

These minutely documented (and in one case internationally televised) performances turned her own body into a medium for sculpture. Between 1990 and 1993 she undertook nine operations to alter features, using as a template specific detail chosen from famous Renaissance and post-Renaissance paintings of idealized females. While this project has sometimes been erroneously described as an effort to recreate the ideal of Western beauty in her own body, in fact Orlan notes that she

chose each model (among them Boucher's Europa, da Vinci's Mona Lisa, Botticelli's Venus, and Gêrome's Psyche) for their histories rather than their beauty. To emphasize this fact, she inserted silicon bumps on her forehead in the last operation, which, as she points out, lean more toward the model of the grotesque than the beautiful (Heartney 2004:227).

The effect achieved through this process is readily affiliated with feminist statements about appearance in accordance with different beauty norms. Furthermore, the documentation of the process attributes to the abjected body matter/fluids of surgery and is filmed to contrast it with the seamless beauty ideal promoted in cosmetic surgery.



Figure 3.1. Orlan, *Omniprésence* (1993). Cibachrome in Diasec mount, 110 x 165cm (Schultz-Touge 2004:137)

What reinforces the notion of performance is that the surgeon along with all the nurses and other individuals at the operation wore clothes designed by famous fashion designers (Figure 3.2). This explicit hint to the fashion industry emphasises the social status cosmetic surgery has attained in contemporary culture. The operation is afforded the same theatricality that popular culture affords the many bodies projected as ideal and/or beautiful. Hence, Orlan not only 'purchases' the commodities of beauty but the process through which it is achieved reflects the commercialisation of surgical procedures.



Figure 3.2. Orlan, Omniprésence (1993). Cibachrome in Diasec mount, 110 x 165cm (Schultz-Touge 2004:136)

Cosmetic surgery consequently becomes less deterministic in relation to purchasing the ideal body and submits to the 'fancy' of the patient. 'Fancy' here refers to varying perceptions of attractiveness and also what a body looks like.

Body modification represents enhancements based on the idea that the body is a site for construction and expression and that abstract body ideals can be employed to decorate and adorn the body. 'BodMod' refers to a subculture which practices body modification described as: "the lasting or even semi-permanent deliberate altering of the human body for non-medical reasons, such as spiritual, various social (markings) or aesthetic" (Body modification 2005). In the context of this research the term 'BodMod' describes the non-normative manner in which cosmetic surgery operations are 'reinterpreted' when silicone or other implants are inserted into the body in ways not conventionally represented or approved by popular culture.

Adornment of this nature is not likely to gain much popularity since the processes involved require the willing patient to endure significant amounts of pain and the health risks are equally contentious. Yet, there are frequent references to communities that practice such



body modifications. These practices are now known to a wider audience because images of such adornment are easily accessible via the internet.



Figure 3.3. Ashleigh Sim, (Untitled) (s.a.) (Tay 2008. Art or mutilation? [Online])

The process of acquiring some of these features involve the surgical insertion of foreign materials below the surface of the skin creating raised areas on parts of the body where desired. An example is Orlan's kidney shaped silicone implants under the skin on her forehead near her temples. This unconventional silhouette of the face is a product of Orlan's desire or 'fancy'. What is meant here is that the face does not conventionally have kidney shaped protrusions near the temples of the forehead. The acceptability of body modifications by a generic public depends on where on the body these modifications are located. Here "the readiness to fetishize the value of certain body parts, so that their mistreatment may be portrayed as violating norms of decency and respect, provided further emotional intensity" (Seale, Cavers & Dixon-Woods 2006:37), and places the type of body modification represented by Figure 3.3 in a non-normative context. Sensationalist media such as tabloids and commercial fashion magazines promote the ideal body as having a specific design. The surface of the body is understood to be flawless where no protrusions are to be found. Yet, the fetishist approach of the bodmod subculture to insert silicone and

Teflon shapes in specified positions below the surface of the skin is a continuing practice, even though these types of modifications are not necessarily socially favourable.

There is however another means of adding to the body. The description of a process that extracts adipose tissue from one area of the body and adds it to another in the same body to add volume can generate a mild sense of disgust. The general assumption about this process would be that once fat is extracted from the body, it is better classified as an abject substance and therefore ought to be discarded. This understanding is linked to the initial interpretation of Julia Kristeva's theory on abjection (1982:4), which states that abjection is "what disturbs identity, system, order what does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite". The prospect of reinserting fat in the body would therefore break the natural order, especially where the extracted fat is inserted in a different location.

This specific procedure, according to Christian Nordqvist (2009), involves the following:

The patient's own fat is collected from one part of the body and injected into areas requiring volume-enhancement. The results are generally safe and long lasting. Patients are generally more satisfied with this procedure because often two birds are killed with one stone - fat is removed from a part of the body that needs fat reduction, and then added to another part that requires more volume. When the fat is removed it is washed and purified and then carefully re-injected with specially designed needles. Sometimes the procedure needs to be repeated several times for best results.

The hands and face are often the locations where these injections occur, as these are the areas claimed to decrease in volume as people age (Nordqvist 2009). It is pertinent to take into account that fat grafting involves a cosmetic surgical procedure that adds volume with the aid of biological matter, unlike the silicone implants as previously discussed. This shifts the description of commodity from a product outside the body, the silicone implants, and appropriates it to the body where fat then becomes a commodity. Yet the process still conforms to the purchase of a body ideal, irrespective of the materials used. The transfer of fat from and to different areas of the body validates the impression originally offered that the body simultaneously constitutes a type of commodity and therefore adornment.

This notion can be pushed further with Norman Cherry's (2006) proposition to employ stem cell research as a means to create body adornment. This interpretation pushes the boundaries which exist between body and adornment by explicitly associating body matter with the function of jewellery and the 'body' more convincingly adopts the classification of an object with 'use-value' which can be purchased therefore rendering it a commodity.

### 3.3 Norman Cherry – angiogenetic body adornment

Contemporary art and specifically contemporary jewellery, presents a safe context in which to experiment with non-normative body adornment since abstract ideas are often entertained when substantiated with logical, comprehensive reasoning. An example is the work of contemporary jeweller Norman Cherry and particularly his research into the hypothetical prospect of growing jewellery for the body.

Cherry is interested in "various methods by which people augment their bodies permanently, including tattooing, piercing, scarification and cosmetic surgery" (Grant 2005:70). These methods are all aimed at achieving an end result which is presumed to be appealing and focuses on cosmetic surgery since this method realises the insertion of foreign matter below the skin for aesthetic reasons. Cherry began enquiring about research in an area associated with stem cell research called angiogenesis which is a biological process in which, under certain conditions, new blood vessels grow in certain areas of the body, such as the wall in the uterus during a menstrual cycle (Cherry 2006).

Cherry's angiogenetic adornments can loosely be described as genetic engineering during which cells extracted from a chosen area of the human body is grown into a 'culture' - a larger quantity of the same cells (Cherry 2006). The aim of this process is achieved once the grown sample is reinserted in the body from which it originated and in this way assimilates with bodily processes. As mystical as this process may sound, its incorporation into rendering more personalised modifications of the body is plausible. In his research article Cherry explains the idea that a patient, who willingly undergoes invasive surgeries to add something, often has the choice of a silicone or saline-based prosthetic implant. Angiogenesis offers a way of incorporating biological matter that would be more acceptable

to the body than a foreign substance. It seems to be especially significant since “work is underway to grow new breast tissue, using existing tissue from the legs or buttocks” (Cherry 2006). This process facilitates the fat injections discussed earlier and supports the understanding that body matter from a patient’s own body can be reintegrated as a volume-adding feature.



Figure 3.4. Norman Cherry, *Angiogenetic Body Adornment* (2004). (Indicates proposed soft tissue growth around the wrist) (Cherry 2006)

Angiogenesis therefore presents a more biological method of enhancing the body. The cells are grown in an environment that is assumed to be sterile and reinserted along with a scaffold that dissolves naturally in the body (Cherry 2006) (see Figure 3.4). An adorning feature is often one which is aimed at either enhancing an existing body feature or providing the body with an embellishment that is unique. The unique nature of the embellishment is further suggested by the fact that it is of biological origin and therefore intimately linked to the wearer. Cherry’s angiogenetic adornment fits this category.

The procedures discussed conform to the notion that the body is capable of being redesigned. Of further interest is the idea that practices are underway to reclassify body matter as adornment. This scenario is fuelled, thus far, only by the article written by Norman Cherry and a prototype produced from human cells has yet to be created. Note

that this comment is made with regard to the strict classification of contemporary jewellery. It is acknowledged that the artist Stelarc had commissioned and successfully 'created' an artificial ear which has been surgically inserted into his left forearm (Stelarc s.a.). The process by which the ear had been grown conforms to that being described by Cherry for the angiogenetic body adornment. The relevance of incorporating this interpretation of body adornment in my research is to provide an understanding that body matter can qualify as adornment especially where it has been extracted and acquired an object classification.

Cherry chose to explore the relationship of cosmetic surgery to body adornment in an explicit, invasive manner. The following section considers the work of Christoph Zellweger who depicts this relationship as visual abstractions of the body and prosthetics rather than explicit body modifications.

### 3.4 Christoph Zellweger

The writings of Christoph Zellweger have been resoundingly inspirational to this research. In particular, the quote; "the body itself is the new jewel" (Zellweger 2008) was fundamental to initiating a study which considers body fat as a viable object of adornment. His particular perspective developed through a series of writings and exhibitions and although not all of these works are considered, the primary points taken from each stage are discussed.

Zellweger has a noted background as a Swiss jeweller and is descended from six generations of "goldsmiths, silversmiths and watchmakers" (Margetts 2007:6), a fact that would almost certainly influence his work. Such a history could have cultivated a design aesthetic that conforms to what appeals to the masses in commercial jewellery. Instead, this very fact prompted him to deviate from a predisposed path. He felt that "life is not just about making beautifully refined and expensive things, but also about expression, about making a difference" (Margetts 2007:6). It is this focus on a conceptual approach that makes his projects non-normative or radical in nature and provides an interpretation of the developments in contemporary jewellery. He also forges a link to cosmetic surgery since he reproduces medical advancements and prosthetic replacements of adornment, to be worn or displayed with the body and anatomical references.



Around June/July 2012 an exhibition was organised in a European gallery specifically to debut Zellweger's latest creations. This exhibition, titled Excessories (Presentation s.a.) pertained very explicitly to fat, post-surgery, as a symbol of 'loss' which Zellweger considers an apt attribute of jewellery (Presentation s.a.). Furthermore, by highlighting this attribute, his quotation of the body being like a jewel, is exemplified.

This notion of the body as jewel is featured in several publications, at seminars and on a significant number of websites. The concept is expressed in the article "Phantom Limbs" (Botha 2008) that appeared in the Design Indaba 2008 Publication and prominently focuses on Zellweger's work and motivation for revaluing the body as a jewel. The article has also been incorporated by Zellweger in his contribution of a research article in a publication made for a separate conference dealing with matters pertaining to design research. The book titled Foreign Bodies (Zellweger 2008) relates the same information as the aforementioned article. This information is supplemented by writings from other authors affiliated with Zellweger and therefore provides differing perspectives and insight to his work. This book (as well as a series of the same name) was the first source on the work of Christoph Zellweger that I researched.

The book Foreign Bodies (Zellweger 2007) explains Zellweger's understanding of the body as a commodity. This chapter deals with the body as commodity and this particular section with the notion that the body is also capable of being designed.

Martina Margetts (2007:6) explains Zellweger's work:

He undertakes an intensive search to understand the way we fit into the world and how we want to shape it. His thoughts have always embraced philosophy, politics and science, genetics and ethics, nature and artifice. This jeweller recognizes that the shape of our future existence lies in the delicate interrelationship between nature and technology and while scientists and technologists are responsible for progressing this, artists can reflect, commentate and dispute.

My approach in this research focuses more on the graphic display and incorporation of abject matter in the body in order to produce volume, an approach that differs somewhat from Zellweger's work. He acknowledges the work of the plastic surgeon and comments on the notions that the body is capable of being modified, yet his own practical resolve

develops in the form of objects created within the original premise of jewellery in order to appeal to an audience. This is primarily due to Zellweger's concern with luxury items, an aspect evident in all his work. In turn this understanding is best articulated by Margetts (2007:18):

Zellweger does not supply conventional beauty in his work. "It's not a formal exercise," he says. He tries to seduce through surface texture and form. But behind his seduction is uncertainty. There is the importance of touch - but repulsion - is a constant theme. His chains, pins, bones are important to handle: they become humanised as wearable. The meaning is shifted by shifting the context. He is loading the object with association, trying to define what jewellery can be.

Zellweger's work is aptly described as seductive since the objects he produces based on his theoretical interests hold an aesthetic appeal.



Figure 3.5. Christoph Zellweger, Relic Rosé (2006). Mixed media, flock, silver (Christoph Zellweger – portrait. 2009 [Online])



Figure 3.6. Christoph Zellweger, Fakes (2006). Tagua Nut (Tagua works s.a. [Online])

The works in Figures 3.5 and 3.6 reveal the idea of seductiveness very successfully. Although the objects are designed with body matter (bones) in mind, their execution is unique. The flock (synthetic fibre) covered surface of the Relic Rosé (2006) (Figure 3.5) series makes the mostly abnormally shaped bone structures more approachable even though their context depicts mutated bones. The addition of the silver chain decreases the intimidation felt about this non-normative subject matter. Fakes (2006) (Figure 3.6) mimics real bone in terms of shape, colour and implied texture very successfully even though the material is actually plant based. Thus both series mentioned deal with body matter even though each interpretation places focus on a different attribute of adornment, Relic Rosé entices viewers with its seductive surface finish and Fakes emulates the quaint and dainty material and design of traditional jewellery.



Figure 3.7. Christoph Zellweger, Foreign Body (2003). Medical stainless steel, bone (Christoph Zellweger – portrait. 2009 [Online])

Figure 3.7 is a hypothetical design of a medical prosthetic even though it conforms to conventional prosthetics in terms of material and implied use. What is interesting about this piece is the fact that it is displayed like an art object, it is neither functional nor intended to provide any information about the medical field of prosthetics but is considered solely for its aesthetic appeal. The title of the piece highlights its function in the body but also the distanced relationship such an object presents to the human anatomy and therefore highlights the emotive value prosthetics have with their recipients. Irrespective of this, the design accounts mostly for its practical function rather than any 'fancy' the recipient may be pursuing in designing a body commodity. Furthermore the object, although neatly positioned to perfectly fit along the bone provided, does not appear to belong to the position in the body from where the bone originates. The impression gained thus reflects Zellweger's slighted concern for the object's medical function and highlights a rather playful, ironic approach to the object.

Design thus takes precedence over both the body and adornment. The added perspective of designing the body, which creates a link between body/adornment and design, is understood to be the premise of Zellweger's work.

Dr. Pietro Morandi (2007:42-46) explains an understanding of Zellweger's perspective:

Jewellery has a socio-cultural function, body-adornment serves communication. It is an aid that shifts the functional body towards a body of meaning. Zellweger sees the human body as *homo ipsi faber*; i.e., as a human, who strives to invent himself; a being, whose transformational fantasy and imagination overshadows what even its most advanced and boldest technologies of modification and self-change are able to reach. It is undisputed: the human body will not only be increasingly interpreted as functionally 'limited', as insufficiently beautiful, as defective and unsatisfactory, but also actually modified. It is here where new technologies should come to the rescue to fulfil our heightened expectations.

It is pertinent at this point to emphasise the relevance of incorporating the use of 'prosthesis' in relation to the body and adornment. The Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (1983. Sv. 'prosthesis') defines prosthesis as: "in medicine, (a) the replacement of a missing part of the body, as a limb, eye, or tooth, by an artificial substitute, (b) such a substitute".

Botha reflects on Zellweger's description of his work as prosthesis and puts forward the idea that Zellweger aims to "bring the discourse around body modification and adornment, which has been taken over by plastic surgery, back into the field of jewellery" (2008). However, it is the logic presented by Zellweger's *Foreign Bodies* series that places Botha's comment above in the appropriate context. Zellweger chose to redesignate the medical prosthesis from something which is functional to that which is aesthetically pleasing. The link between the body and an emotional attachment which is conventionally associated with jewellery is transferred to the prosthetic. Thus the prosthetic possesses a value of need where it is a necessary addition to the physiology of an individual and also having a symbolic value of emotional attachment associated with its aesthetic appeal. The symbolic value renders the practical use of the prosthetic irrelevant thus validating its use as adornment. The title of *Foreign Bodies* is relevant in that it acknowledges the material difference a prosthetic has to bone or cartilage in the body. This understanding adds further motivation for its ulterior use as an adornment especially since the prosthetic has metallic properties, an attribute readily associated with a jewellery context. Another interpretation of this difference is that, since the object is worn on the outside of the body, it gains a 'foreign' status as it is created to fit inside the body.



Figure 3.8 Christoph Zellweger, Hip piece – neck piece (2002). Second hand medical steel prosthesis and leather, Prosthesis: 17 x 5 x 5cm, leather: 80cm (Grant 2005:116)



Figure 3.9. Christoph Zellweger, Body support (Phoca thumb) (2006). Rubber and metal (Prezio young 2013 – Announcement s.a. [Online])

His collections Foreign Bodies, Relic Rosé, Fakes and Body support, gives the collective impression that what is displayed are pseudo-prosthetics which possess an adorning quality,

but also hint at a kind of emotional attachment on the part of the proposed wearer. It is in the objects of Figures 3.8 and 3.9 where this impression is most evident. The work Hip piece – neck piece (2002) (Figure 3.8) is assumed to have been produced as a proposed variant for using a prosthetic hip joint. Having this piece worn by a physically impaired individual (Figure 3.8) brings to mind the emotional value attached to a medical prosthetic created to alleviate the wearer's physical condition. It is a prosthetic in two ways. The first refers to the medical association from which Zellweger's objects draw their inspiration and material composition. The second refers to the emotional attachment; the idea that the prosthetic has value because it promotes an unimpaired life. This impression of emotional prosthesis is strongly expressed in Figure 3.9 Body support (Phoca thumb) (2006). When not worn, the object is of a peculiar design, an attribute akin to that of normal prostheses but when worn, the object is granted a value very closely linked with emotional concerns. The rubber component wraps around the wrist of the wearer and the metal ring is worn like a conventional finger ring. The 'prosthetic' description is realised in the description of the rubber component 'wrapping' around the wrist of the wearer which confirms the description of 'support'. This secure means of wearing this ring also provides an emotional content to the word support where the emotional prosthetic description for the piece is rendered convincing. The accompanying picture of two hands holding each other exemplifies the practical use of the piece and positions it in a sympathetic context. It is understood that the body-object relationship is explicitly linked through emotional concerns thus validating its classification as an emotional prosthetic.

It is common for jewellery to be perceived as receptacles of meaning where pieces which are influenced by the body (Figure 3.8. Hip piece – neck piece), or which are designed to mimic medical counterparts used to extend the life of an individual (Figure 3.7. Foreign bodies), or make it significantly more live-able, are all valued because they harbour an emotional significance to the wearer. These objects possess a functional link with the body of their wearer, however, it is the emotional link that dominates. Zellweger's pieces then, suggest that what was originally considered a body modification, is equated with the emotional value attributed to a prized jewel.



Zellweger's latest contribution, titled *Excessories* (Presentation s.a.), introduces the next phase in this understanding of body modifications attaining the status of emotional prosthetics, in addition to being categorised as commodities. Very little information was available on this series of works at the time of documenting this research. In fact, having only an exhibition invitation as source material (along with limited reviews of the exhibition) for analysing the work, all that I can state about this series are the details provided for the exhibition's promotion. The exhibition was held at the Galerie Louise Smit from 8 July 2012 to 31 August 2012. The Klimt02 website only shows several images along with a description of the concept which motivated the work. The information is provided under the heading "Presentation":

The Swiss artist, Christoph Zellweger is internationally known for pushing boundaries on the definition of body adornment. Zellweger creates objects, one-off jewellery pieces and fictional products, which position themselves between critical design and object art.

EXCESSORIES introduces the notion of excess, which best defines today's social habits of consumption. 'Excess' lays [sic.] at the etymological core of the word luxury. What exceeds, what overflows, is the most exuberant side of nature and this is often manifested in the form of FAT, BODILY FAT.

Zellweger has identified the contemporary obsession with fat and produced highly aesthetic works in blown glass. These works made up of empty, translucent volumes, seem to overflow. Each artefact is marked with a weight reference coming from operation protocols (plastic surgery). The figures report on the diverse fates of fat of past operations to become metaphors for absence and loss (s.a.).

Excess is a primary feature in this exhibition and is used as a marker of materialism often associated with jewellery, or at least the preciousness of body adornments. The excessive nature of materialism links to the body by incorporating representations of the body as excessively fat. The glass volumes mimic fat cells and are intended to represent receptacles of emotional loss associated with extracting body matter. The main focus is on the possible interpretation that the extracted, abject body matter – fat - can be valued for its reference to loss. However, the notion of 'loss' is not presented as significantly as the aesthetic appeal of the blown glass shapes. The metaphorical associations projected through Zellweger's work are easily grasped, since glass is used as a medium to depict fat. It is assumed that society finds it easier to relate to glass than fat since this body matter stirs up mixed emotions. There is delight in the loss of it, as the body would then conform to the idealised

types promoted by the media. Plastic surgery becomes the enabling factor in rendering body matter a form of adornment. Zellweger, however, chooses to represent this social gain as an emotional loss, which he further accentuates by the presence of a weight reference. This reception reinitiates the interpretation offered by Gimlin (2000:81) where patients of cosmetic surgery “work even harder to reattach their identities to their new appearances”. Zellweger’s *Excessories* series emphasises the notion of loss which, according to the aforementioned quotation, could be related to a loss of identity or ‘self’ on the part of the post-liposuction patient. This being an emotionally charged issue, renders the title of *Excessories* as an appropriate critique on the cosmetic surgery discourse where an excessive part of the body which was once part of the whole body was extracted. It also hints at the body being commodified since the fat cell is represented as a glass volume rather than the actual body matter which is then presented as a contemporary jewellery object and therefore links it back to the description of jewellery being a receptacle of meaning.



Figure 3.10. Christoph Zellweger, *Excessories* (necklace 3330) (2012). Glass, Textile (Christoph Zellweger exhibition at Galerie Louise Smit 2012 [Online])



Figure 3.11. Christoph Zellweger, Excessories (necklace R189) (2012). Glass, Textile (Christoph Zellweger exhibition at Galerie Louise Smit 2012 [Online])

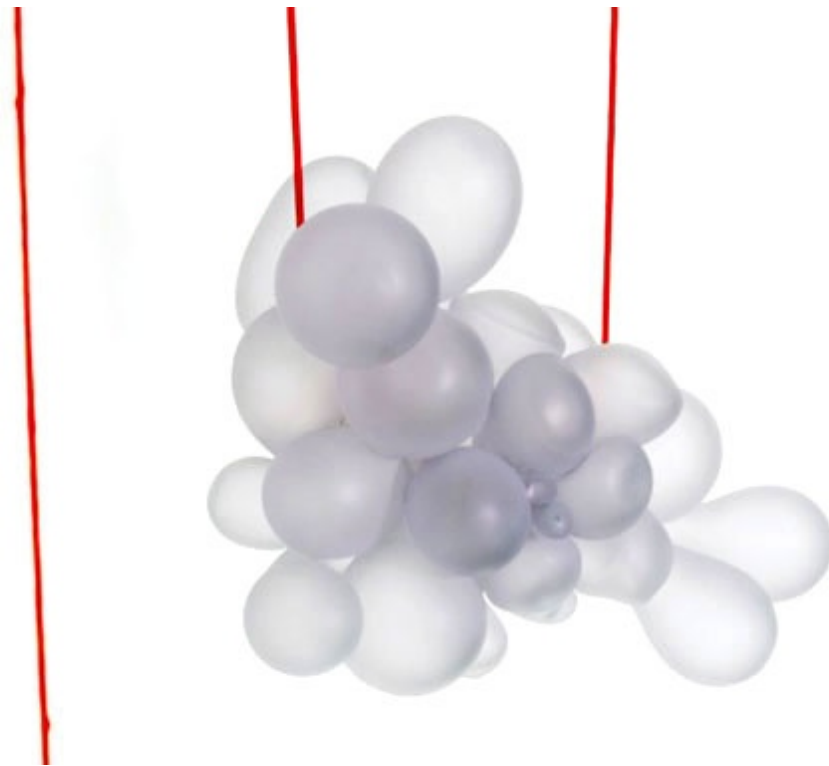


Figure 3.12. Christoph Zellweger, Excessories (necklace 818) (2012). Glass, Textile (Christoph Zellweger exhibition at Galerie Louise Smit 2012 [Online])

I consider the objects of Excessories to have a mostly decorative value, even though they act as visual cues for conversation. One such cue could be the desire to discuss the extraction of fat in plastic surgery in terms of loss, in both a literal and an emotional sense, since what was once part of the body is now apart from it. Furthermore there is an understanding formulated thus far that Zellweger's work places strong emphasis on emotional prosthetics. In this series of works the consideration of the objects being like a prosthetic is slighted since the materials used are not readily associated with cosmetic surgery/surgical discourse. In fact, the exclusion of metal – only mimicked with a mirror finished cluster of glass shapes contrasts with the previous style established in Zellweger's work (den Besten 2012). Jewellery has been described as encasing the emotional concerns of the wearer since a value is attributed to it. In this way, Zellweger's work is an aesthetically appealing version of body matter offered in the place of the radical jewellery of Cherry, yet both speak in different ways of the body, cosmetic surgery and commodities.

### 3.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, emphasis was placed on the classification of the body and/or its parts as a type of commodity.

Firstly, the body was discussed with respect to the various means of representation in the media and popular culture. It was motivated that these representations condition certain perceptions of what constitutes ideal body types, noted as a form of biopower and that they indoctrinate viewers to consider these as 'standard'. This perception was further developed by discussing cosmetic surgery as a method of acquiring this ideal and that this renders the body a commodity.

The various methods employed in invasive procedures to realise this ideal and non-normative representations of body modification were discussed. Orlan's surgeries along with a brief description of body modification and the proposal for angiogenetic body adornment were offered as examples of this realisation. These particular examples contributed to the perception that the body ideal is a commodity to be purchased and that the various procedures endured in the process were part of a necessary function.

Adornment was discussed with particular focus on the manner in which cosmetic surgery validates modification of the body and focuses the attribution of value from something outside of the physical self to below the skin surface.

Zellweger's work represents the idea that adornment can still bare the significance attributed to it in the cosmetic surgery context without the need for invasive action. Borrowing from a surgical context, Zellweger reclassifies medical enhancements as emotional prosthetics and harnesses these objects as external adornment. The Excessories series is his latest contribution to this perception which aptly places into context the conflated mixed emotions which body modification spawns. This work however does not employ the use of medical prosthetics but recreates body matter as an emotional prosthetic. Here ownership is taken of the term "emotional prosthetic" (Zellweger 2008:14) since the objects resulting from the Excessories series link closer to adornment due to the use of glass – than as a surgical reference.

The following chapter recounts my practical research as it developed concurrent to the understanding of the body-object relationship established thus far.

## Chapter 4: Fat cells as adornment

In this chapter I consider the practical component of my research, linking it to the contemporary jewellery practices discussed in the previous chapters, where the relationship between jewellery and the body is considered with examples depicting either an abject body or abject body matter. I also give an overview of the process and evolution which the fat cell adornments have undergone along with a consideration of the reception of these pieces.

### 4.1 Process work: 2011 to 2013

The work produced for the duration of this research had changed dramatically over a period of almost three years. A variety of materials other than metals were experimentally employed to find objects which referenced the body both visually and physically. This section recounts the transformation which my work has undergone from merely referencing the silhouette of the body with fabric to emulating the factors involved in creating such a silhouette in the body with silicone fat cells.

Realising the practical component to compliment the theory, involved a series of experiments which referenced the body in a tangible way. The purpose of including this information at this stage is to explain the development of the final body of work as a process of uncovering the true appearance of fat. This process started by considering firstly the surface of the body and secondly its shape as a way of understanding the physical structure and limits of bodily fat. Since fat is hidden matter in the body, these initial experiments were aimed at manipulating body fat from the outside, to contribute to a better understanding of the body-object relationship. The non-normative body is acknowledged as a factor in understanding this relationship in this research and therefore an obese body type was chosen for investigation. This body type was explored in two ways: (i) the contours of the body were considered by tracing a path on the body as a way of documenting it and (ii) these contours were then translated as an accessory which would be

a relative reference to body shape. What follows are a series of untitled experiments attempted in the first few months of study as a way to physically understand the process of the body becoming an object. The series is not chronological.

The attempts to document the body were spurred by the verbal reference 'silhouette' in describing body shape. However, this understanding did not incorporate the subtle differences in volume found on isolated areas of the body but referred to the overall shape. To overcome this obstacle, a description of contours proved to be more convenient and the following are two experiments aimed at representing contours.

Sheets of cardboard were used as a medium to translate the contours of the body into a form of body adornment. The intention was to echo the method of creating an incline on land similar to how a topographical map indicates heights of mountain ranges with rings where the distance between each ring would indicate the gradient or incline of the mountain. The design for the pieces of Figure 4.1 was based on the gradients of mountain ranges as depicted on a topographic map. This interpretation presented a unique perspective of the body since two-dimensional images could almost be interpreted mathematically through the lines and layers. This dissecting approach proved beneficial only in so far as a whole surface area could be presented and although it translated the body as an object, it was not a wearable one. It was necessary to include the wearable feature of the final objects in this research.



Figure 4.1. Mouroodah Darries, Contour series I (2011). Project cardboard, sizes range between 11 x 5.5 x 1 cm and 9 x 7 x 1 cm.



The next experiment also focussed on contours but in a different manner. The series in Figure 4.1 could become wearable through a pin fixture however, their references to the body would not be very convincing since the contours would rest awkwardly on the existing contours of the wearer's body. To eliminate this error, the wearable object needed to literally trace the wearer's body contours. This experiment prompted sourcing treasure maps as a way of indicating the gradient of contours similar to the rings of Figure 4.1.



Figure 4.2. Mouroodah Darries, Contour series II (2011). Perspex, brass bath chain, enamel,  
Pendant: 9 x 8.5 x 0.35 cm Chain: 100 x 0.35 cm (dia.).

This simple approach to indicate body contours proved to be more entertaining than informative. The crude format of a dotted line and an 'X' lacked any real bodily reference and became more of a commercial object than a body-related experiment (Figure 4.2). Furthermore when worn, gravity would always cause the pendant to bypass the contours of the body and the chain would drop straight down, thus echoing a normal pendant rather than a tool to indicate the gradients of contours. What this experiment did contribute was an acknowledgement that a more direct approach was needed. The following series dealt with the tangible element of the body as opposed to mimicking only the surface.

Fabrics were chosen because of their soft and pliable quality and ease in working with it, which provided a freedom not present when manipulating hard metal. This choice was made when I observed that the body appears to have these same qualities. Fabric can be stretched and manipulated like skin and therefore form complex shapes when fixed at strategic points.

The first series of experiments based on this understanding were made with organza, a fabric which proved to be easily manipulated while retaining a set shape when fixed (Figures 4.3 and 4.4). These experiments, although liberating in the shift to a softer medium, were unsuccessful for two distinct reasons.

1. The objects produced poorly reflected an understanding of the silhouette of a human body.
2. The success of creating a wearable object was dismissed when the objects provided no real logical contribution in the first reason.



Figure 4.3. Mouroodah Darries, Untitled fabric experiments I (2011). Organza fabric and cotton thread, sizes range between 5 x 5 x 3cm and 11.5 x 5 x 9cm.

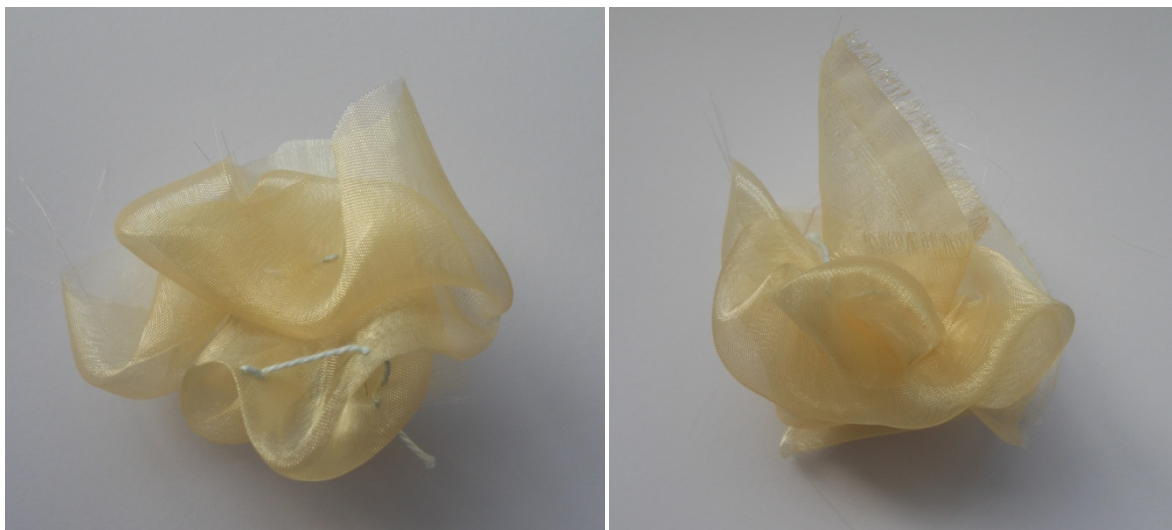


Figure 4.4. Mouroodah Darries, Untitled fabric experiments I (2011). Organza fabric and cotton thread (detail).

I then shifted my attention to excessive representations of the body inspired by images of Jenny Saville and Glenn Luchford in the *Closed Contact* (1995-1996) photographic series (see Figure 4.5). Jenny Saville is a British artist whose work comprises mostly “large, fleshly female figures” (Kieran 2005:80). What I found interesting about the *Closed Contact* series was the manner in which the images “show her face and body in contorted postures pressed up against a pane of glass” (Kieran 2005:80). My fabric experiments aimed to mimic these distorted views of flesh since they appeared to present an impression of an excessive, ‘grotesque’ body very convincingly. Once again however, the errors noted in the previous fabric experiments were highlighted. Overcoming these obstacles was then attempted by making the experiments wearable.



Figure 4.5. Jenny Saville and Glen Luchford, *Closed Contact #4* (1995). C-print mounted in plexiglass, 182.9 x 182.9 x 15.2 cm. 4 from edition of 6 (By Jenny Saville, *Closed Contact #4* s.a. [Online])



Figure 4.6. Mouroodah Darries, *Untitled Fabric experiments II* (2011). Georgette fabric and cotton thread, sizes range between 21.5 x 13 cm and 33 x 20.5 cm.





Figure 4.7. Mouroodah Darries, Untitled Fabric experiments III (2011). Fabric, cotton thread and wool, sizes range between 58 x 32 cm and 64 x 15 cm.

The use of fabric and wool as mediums in jewellery presented a significant problem to the reception of the work. Creating wearable objects from fabric often required the use of attachments conventionally associated with the clothing industry, this being the significant problem. The pieces in Figure 4.7 were created as an evolved form of those in Figure 4.6.

Here a comparison can be drawn with Gijs Bakker's work titled *Bib* (1976) (see Figure 2.1) insofar as my interpretation is a three-dimensional representation of the lower abdomen and Bakker represents the chest via a two-dimensional photograph. This comparison is not intended to reflect on Bakker's work by disregarding *Bib* (1976) as a representation of contemporary jewellery. Rather it is to note that the attempt to mimic excessive body fat via fabric ended up being poor representations of the body and the resulting pieces tended more towards items of clothing than adornment, similarly to the way *Bib* (1976) could be regarded as a clothing item. This last attempt encouraged me to consider the body more critically and to take into account the various factors which contribute to the formation of fat.

It is at this point that fat cells became the primary focus of my practical work and with the addition of the abject as theoretical inspiration, there developed a desire to create the morphology of these cells so as to possibly escape the boundary of the body. The challenge was to create these cells convincingly, which required producing them in a medium that looked and possibly felt, like the imagined body matter would.



Figure 4.8. Mouroodah Darries, Design drawings – fat cells (2012). Pencils and coloured pencils on paper, A4 page: 29.3 x 21.2 cm.

This led to the consideration of silicone as a medium which also proved to be an appropriate visual link to the glossy surface of fat cells and the interior of the body, thus representing the abject in the creation of wearable adornments. What is equally significant is the fact that silicone, although not the exact type employed in this process, is referred to when the implants were mentioned in Chapter 3 which aim at providing volume in specific areas of the body and therefore is a subtle reference to cosmetic surgery.



Figure 4.9. Mouroodah Darries, Silicone fat cells – method I (2012). Silicone, Average: 2 cm (dia.).



Figure 4.10. Mouroodah Darries, Silicone fat cells – method II (2012). Silicone and nylon fishing line, 14.5 x 14.5 x 5.5 cm.





Figure 4.11. Mouroodah Darries, Silicone fat cells – method III (2012). Silicone and copper 15.5 x 13.5 x 6.5 cm.

The first attempts were made as clusters since this is the form in which fat cells appear in the body (see Figures 4.9 to 4.11). The varying methods employed in achieving the correct colour, size and corporeal appearance tended towards being aesthetically appealing. Although incidental, the appeal was not uncommon in terms of the general contemporary jewellery aesthetic and the initial reactions of my peers to the pieces were generally positive. The attractive aesthetic, however, also implied other conventions in the jewellery context especially where attachment of the object was concerned. Even though my intention with the final pieces was for them to be wearable, attaching a brooch pin to the back of the fat cell cluster seemed out of place since this method of attachment would have been forced onto the object rather than integrated – see Figure 4.12. Furthermore when this method of attachment was taken into consideration, the cluster as an adornment appeared contrived rather than naturally formed.

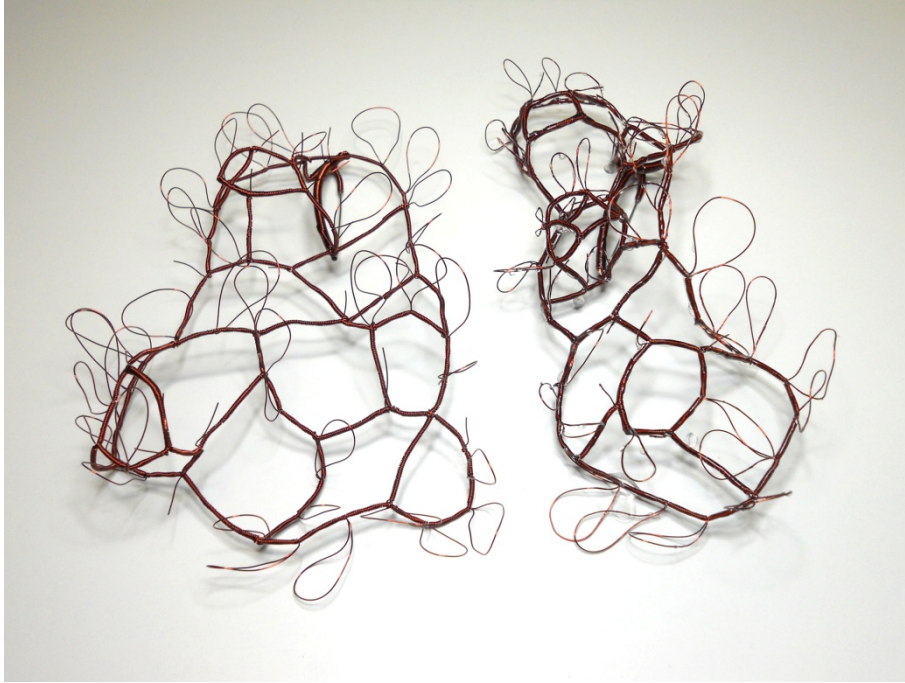


Figure 4.12. Mouroodah Darries, Silicone fat cells – method 3 (Brooches) (2013). Silicone and copper, size range between 19.5 x 8 x 6.2 cm and 18.6 x 13 x 5.3 cm.

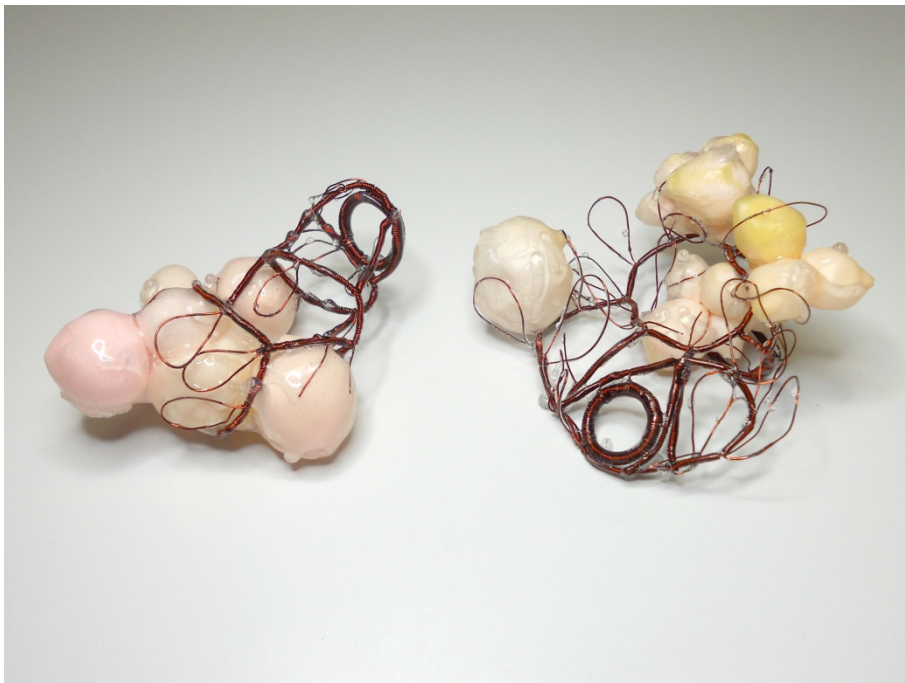


Figure 4.13. Mouroodah Darries, Silicone fat cells – method 3 (Rings) (2013). Silicone and copper, size range between 10.6 x 10.3 x 5.2 cm and 9.8 x 7.2 x 4.6 cm.



Figure 4.14. Mouroodah Darries, Silicone fat cells – method 3 (Neckpiece) (2013). Silicone and copper, 40.3 x 27.6 x 6 cm.

It was when working on the fourth series of fat cell clusters that Christoph Zellweger's Excessories exhibition was brought to my attention. The ornate appearance of his work could be likened to my practical work pictured in Figure 4.15 and I no longer felt that it related to abjection as originally intended.



Figure 4.15. Mouroodah Darries, Silicone fat cells – method 4 (discontinued) (2012). Silicone and copper, 18 x 12 x 5.5 cm.



Body-pieces were considered next without conventional jewellery attachments so that the works could 'hang' on the body. These experiments developed from solid clusters of fat cells to whole portions of the body being recreated along with blood vessels and worn on the part of the body being mimicked. This was meant to be understood as an exaggeration of that portion of the body (Figures 4.16 to 4.17). This attempt was considered because of its visual references being different from that of Zellweger and therefore not conforming to either an ornate aesthetic or the conventions of wearable pieces explored thus far.

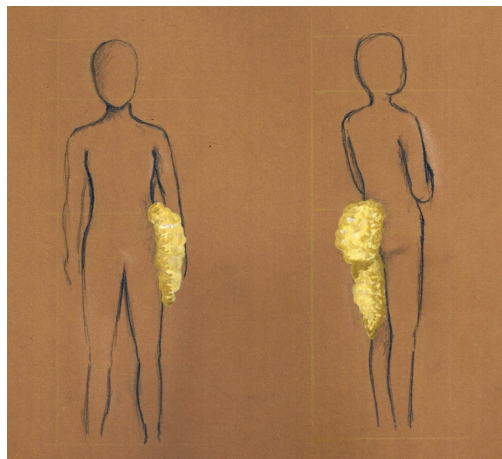


Figure 4.16. Mouroodah Darries, Design drawings – body pieces (2012). Pencils and Gouache on paper, A4 page: 29.3 x 21.2 cm.

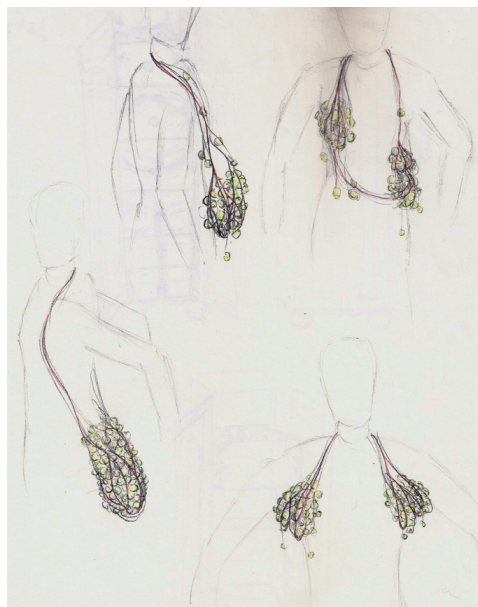


Figure 4.17. Mouroodah Darries, Design drawings – body pieces (2012). Pencil and colour pencil on paper, A4 page: 29.3 x 21.2 cm.

When touched, silicone conjures up feelings of delight because of its smooth surface, yet also possessed the ability to repulse. This was evident from the reaction of most people who viewed this interpretation of fat cells for the first time: they were somewhat hesitant to touch the item and seemed to be repulsed by the strange and glossy coloured spheres (Figures 4.18 – 4.19). The colour shifted from pink hues, credited to a brand of one type of silicone used (Mold Max), to light yellow with a blood red glaze. The reactions of the audience reflected the concept of ‘cognitive dissonance’<sup>20</sup> referred to in Chapter 2 and in this way validated the use of silicone which was found to be a better material to reference abjection than the ones used in previous experiments.

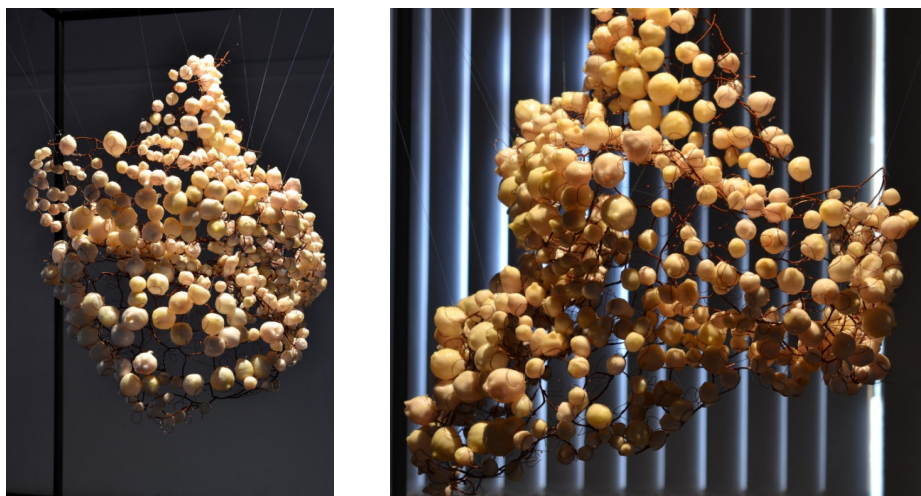


Figure 4.18. Mouroodah Darries, Body piece – version I (2012). Silicone and copper wire, 74 x 51.5 x 11 cm (flat).



Figure 4.19. Mouroodah Darries, Body piece – version I (2012). Silicone and copper wire (detail).

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<sup>20</sup> Refer to page 32 for definition of cognitive dissonance.

During the time spent designing body pieces, Gunther von Hagens' Body Worlds exhibition had its debut showing in Cape Town, South Africa from 31 October 2012 to a few weeks after 31 January 2013. The experience of this spectacle along with being informed of the method of plastination dramatically altered my approach. The term plastination was coined by the anatomist Gunther von Hagens to describe the process of preservation he employs in creating the anatomical models on display in the Body Worlds exhibition. This process involves "curing a polymer inside the specimen" (von Hagens 2009:35) which is later repositioned in a fashion designated for the appropriate display of the body matter/viscera being emphasised. The term is adapted from the much longer description of "Polymer Impregnation of Perishable, Biological Specimens" (von Hagens 2009:31). This innovative process is revolutionary in the medical field, but it is the aesthetic and sculptural tendency of the preserved cadavers which is of interest to this research.

With this inspiration, metal was no longer considered to be a necessary component to the work in order to validate it as a type of jewellery adornment. Further exploration of silicone and plastic mediums were considered appropriate given that plastination employs both these types of materials. Furthermore, the final pieces were produced and conceptualised as part of the contemporary jewellery discourse even though the need for the pieces to be wearable no longer persisted. A modified view was adopted which acknowledged that the specimens on display in von Hagens' Body Worlds could be likened to sculptures just as much as being anatomical specimens for medical research.

The corporeal appearance of fatty body matter, as mentioned before, was the primary focus of the final body of work. It is assumed that individuals considering this work will interpret the relationship of the pieces to their bodies through the knowledge that abject matter is extracted from the body and is thus part of it. Hence, the wearable aspect of the work depends entirely on whether one is willing to handle the piece and on what part of the body it makes sense to either display an excessive amount of fat or place it as an object of adornment – see Figures 4.20 and 4.21.



Figure 4.20. Mouroodah Darries, Silicone fat cells – method 5.1 (Neckpiece) (2013). Silicone, nylon and spandex, 39.6 x 11.8 x 5.4 cm.

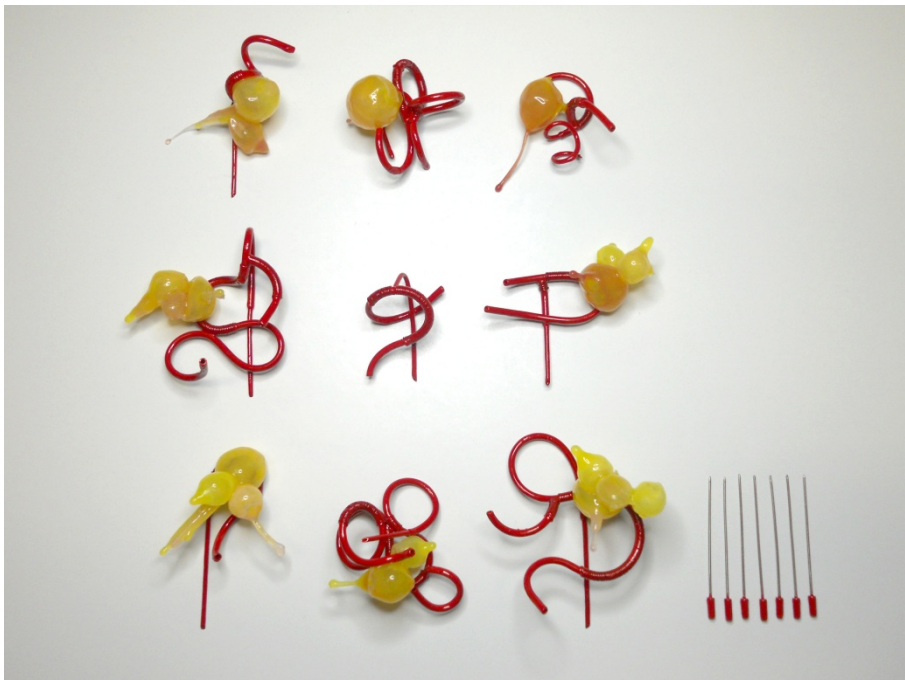


Figure 4.21. Mouroodah Darries, Silicone fat cells – method 5.2 (Brooches and Rings) (2013). Silicone, nylon, copper, brass, steel and enamel paint, size range between 3.8 x 3 x 2.4 cm and 7 x 5.5 x 4.3 cm, pins 4.5 x 0.2 x 0.2 cm.



In this way the practical component of the research is very interactive and completely open to interpretation since no strict reference to jewellery is present and the pieces are capable of being valued both as morphology of object body matter and as unconventionally appealing adornment (Figures 4.22 to 4.24).

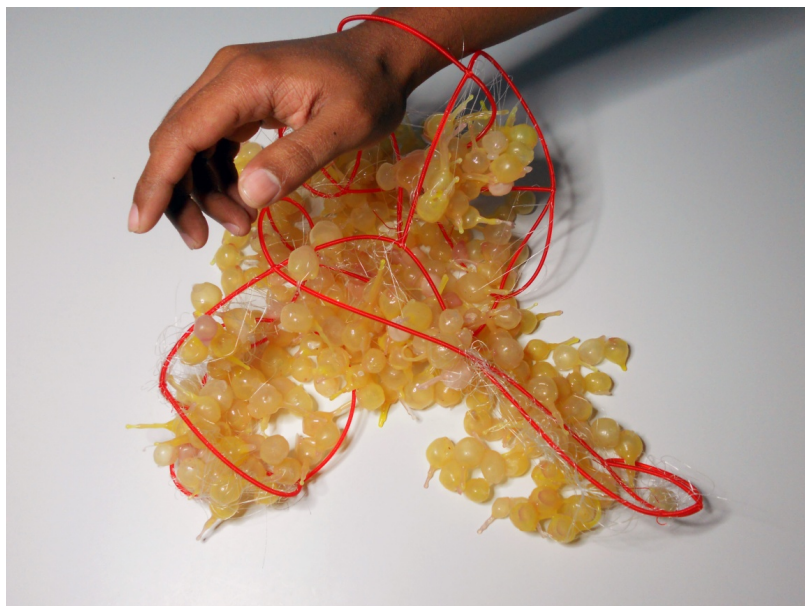


Figure 4.22. Mouroodah Darries, Body pieces – version 3 (2013). Silicone, nylon, spandex and plastic, 43 x 27 x 16 cm.

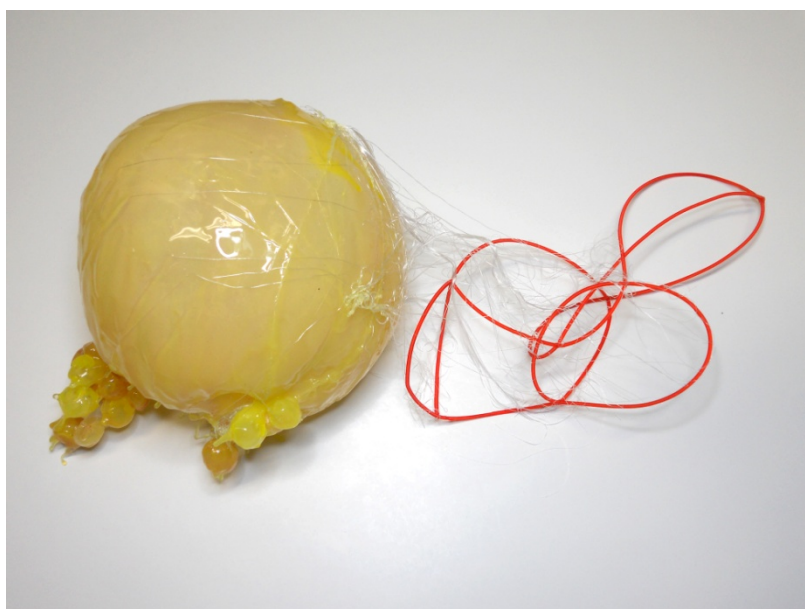


Figure 4.23. Mouroodah Darries, Body pieces – version 3 (2013). Silicone, nylon, spandex and plastic, 61.8 x 18 x 16.5 cm.



Figure 4.24. Mouroodah Darries, *Body pieces – version 3* (2013). Silicone, nylon, spandex and plastic, 59.5 x 29.3 x 12 cm.

The evolution of my practical component can be linked directly to the examples discussed in the theoretical component of this research. Fabric was considered an appropriate medium to recreate the body whilst also being a wearable object. Here Kalman's work was significant since it very convincingly links spectacle, non-normative body types and sartorial body adornments. When fat cells were considered as the chosen visual representation of fat, Zellweger's *Excessories* debuted and the logical link between excess and adornment presented itself. In the final stage of evolution the closer link to abjection was achieved when the intention to emulate the grotesque materiality of body matter was validated as aesthetically appealing through von Hagens' *Body Worlds* exhibition.

This progress indicates a move closer toward the interior of the body by focusing first on superficial interpretation, then on an invasive approach and finally highlighting the abject as visually appealing, though consideration must be given for varying interpretations of the work. The following section considers the tentative matter of discussing body fat and its exploitation as being both relevant as adornment and a taboo application.

#### 4.2 Fat cells as adornment: approaching anti-jewellery jewellery

This section considers opinions on the use of fat as adornment. This action attempts to accommodate the various perspectives involved in the reception to my practical work. The desired perspective of this research would be that the value attributed to jewellery conventions are conveyed to the practical component of this work, yet the work is also categorised as existing in a space between jewellery and non-jewellery. What follows is an attempt to clarify the purpose of creating fat cell adornments and its relation to contemporary jewellery practices.

It is assumed that most individuals do not feel comfortable discussing body fat. It thus stands to reason that this sensitive topic is often side-stepped or wholly ignored as it encompasses society's many insecurities about fat as spectacle. This is the reason why valuing fat as adornment interests me. Acknowledging biopower is fundamental to understanding generalised opinions on non-normative body types. When fat is discussed reactions tend to fall into two categories: (i) the fat body is considered ill and thus associated with negativity or (ii) the condition of obesity or general overweight is considered taboo.

Here Christoph Zellweger's statement that "the body itself is the new jewel" (Christoph Zellweger – portrait 2009) is interesting because it could be interpreted differently in each of the aforementioned categories of reactions to heavy bodies. The first reaction where negativity is emphasised could interpret this quotation to relate to body modification. The body ideal is what would be considered the 'jewel' and this is the body which is desired for purchase. It is at this stage that cosmetic or elective surgery takes precedence and Zellweger's collections of works are appropriately placed as a critique of these procedures. The second reaction where sensitivity towards the overweight body is considered may prompt an emotive interpretation of this quotation. Here the psychological state of the overweight individual can be aligned with the classification of a 'jewel' so that the impact of the spectacle made of the overweight body is softened. The expected result would be that the body ideal of the first reaction is considered insignificant and the weighty individual

accepts his/her physical state, without prejudice. In this way the overweight body can be idealised.

In each of the previous situations where fat was discussed and valued, fat cells were an overlooked factor. This cell type is the physiological component of the body which causes the consideration of varying silhouettes, yet knowledge about it is not apparent because it is hidden from sight. This particular situation prompted the idea to create an exaggerated morphology of fat cells thus highlighting it as a necessary factor in a body-related discourse.

The contentious situation of displaying fat cells became apparent when considering the implications of presenting this body matter to individuals who have the various reactions highlighted above. Furthermore the fat created in my practical work is not strictly being rendered as a medical specimen and therefore does not really conform to scientific or educational interest. Rather it is very explicitly classified as a type of body adornment and this I believe is the crux of the slight disapproval of my pieces.

The reception to non-normative body types has very tactfully been dealt with by Lauren Kalman in her Spectacular series. Her body of work would be an appropriate marker by which to gauge how sensitive issues could be handled when creating objects closely associated with the body as 'wearable'.

The emphasis on elephantiasis is both literal and figurative in Spectacular. The fashion industry context renders this illness through sartorial structures, a method which mutes the intensity of the real body deformity. This decision presents a 'safe area' in which to critique perceptions of the body similar to the way that Zellweger chose to exploit depictions of normative body modification by placing emphasis on cosmetic surgery. In both cases the quotation of "the body itself ... [as] ... the new jewel" (Christoph Zellweger – portrait 2009) is applicable even though each series branches off into different interpretations of the body.

Kalman's work focuses on sexualisation. Lingerie is used as a subtle reference to something which would conventionally elicit repulsion and the response is converted into a sexually-oriented one (Kalman s.a.). Medical specimens and photographs of patients suffering from

elephantiasis are conventionally depicted nude yet the real presence of their illness defers any sexual interest in the specific body being depicted. This perception critiques the fashion industry's focus on emaciated bodies as desirable because of the fashion context. In addition the method employed renders the emphasis on elephantiasis as figurative and the focus is shifted to an understanding of the non-normative body being idealised.

This approach of Kalman influenced my decision to exaggerate fat cells. Both, the size as well as the colour of the cells are presented in a way that is unconventional in medical depictions. The actual body matter is less detailed in terms of shape when it is extracted from the body and the colour of the actual cells is masked by various other bodily fluids which encase, fill and flow through these cell types. This understanding is gained through the knowledge that body fat liquefies once it 'escapes' the body and the repulsive state of an uncontrollable substance that was once inside the body is described as abject (Kristeva 1982:3).

My practical work is intended to be an exaggerated depiction of abject body matter and it is this feature which seems to provoke disapproval in my classification of the pieces as adornment. The next consideration would be to render the objects appealing, an obvious contradiction considering that the abject element has been emphasised. It is at this point where Kalman's reference to lingerie and the fashion industry is relevant and the decision to structure the adornments as wearable objects becomes significant. The morphology of the fat cells in my own work tends to elicit intrigue and a perverse delight since the colour is considered attractive and the shape of the cell is readily associated with beads or pearls. However, these factors are not sufficient to revalue the abject matter as adornment. What was needed at this stage was an appropriate context within which to set the pieces.

The focus on abject hints at the fat cells having physically 'left' the body through a hole in the border dividing the inside of the body from the outside environment. Here Zellweger's Excessories (Presentation s.a.) and the explicit reference to cosmetic surgery are important. Zellweger's series of neckpieces, each representing an extracted portion of fat through liposuction, had a numerical reference to the weight of the fat; literal quantities of body fat being weighed as a gauge of how much fat was extracted from a patient's body through

liposuction. It is also through emphasising the weight that Zellweger brought attention to the notion of loss, not just physical loss but emotional loss as well (Presentation s.a.). The combination of invasive surgery and extraction validated Zellweger's association with loss and rendered his neckpieces appropriate jewellery objects. This understanding is gained through the knowledge that jewellery often serves the purpose of containing memories of an event or person. This intimate association with an object echoes the understanding that Zellweger's neckpieces are imbued with emotion and the body reference implies a loss since the 'fat cells' are now outside as adornment instead of still part of the body.

Loss is not a major concern in the practical component of this study even though Zellweger's use of it as a way to value fat has proved successful. Rather, my interest in rendering fat cells is for aesthetic appeal and to consider this body matter as being worthy of the classification of adornment. Although the prospect of regarding fat inside the body as a 'jewel' (with respect to one interpretation of Zellweger's statement<sup>21</sup>) may lead to some interesting and possibly beneficial perceptions of the body, it would most likely be reasonable to debate whether this is appropriate. Discussing internal fat as a 'jewel' may be considered insensitive as there are individuals who consider their excess weight a hindrance. Therefore, my decision to highlight the object as being body matter which has literally passed the boundary separating the inside of the body from the outside through cosmetic surgery, has proved necessary. Here the knowledge that cosmetic surgery is an invasive procedure and the implied references of body modification and silicone, provide a 'safe' context within which to position my practical work.

The use of silicone and plastic as mediums in my practical component was employed to indicate a link to the plastic surgery discourse. During my final year of undergraduate studies I had the opportunity to handle a sample of a silicone breast implant at a critique session. This experience engendered a sense of the 'artificial' in relation to a body that had undergone cosmetic surgery. The decision to use silicone as a medium to create the fat cells was therefore sourced partly by the implied likeness which it bears to images of fatty tissue and also because silicone in relation to the modified body evoked a sense of the artificial.

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<sup>21</sup> Refer to page 1 of Introduction for full quotation in context.



Yet it has also been noted in Chapter 3 that the artificial element silicone was often desirable as a volume-adding feature to a modified body.

Cosmetic surgery serves as a platform to successfully 'purchase' an ideal body type. Liposuction is a method of achieving this desire since it eliminates undesirable body features (Nordqvist 2009). Where there is a significant lack of volume, silicone is implanted and the results of these invasive procedures are likened to a beauty ideal. It is appropriate to note here that the very matter which is being taken out of the body, namely fat is mimicked with the substance being implanted, silicone. I find this association very relevant in valuing the pieces of adornment created as part of this research. Instead of fat being something abject that must be removed, fatty tissue is being created as adornment and thus retrieves the notion that body fat can in turn possess beauty. Though fat grafting is a common cosmetic procedure (Nordqvist 2009), the application of fat to the body as motivated by these pieces, is not meant to be implants. Instead the pieces exist as adornments outside the body and possess the classification of referencing a part of the body, yet being apart from it. Although a conscious effort is made to mimic internal body matter, the objects are not meant to be scientific.

The fact that von Hagens' Body Worlds exhibition displayed cadavers which were preserved using silicone, was both incidental and a revelation. The knowledge that the work produced as adornment could warrant associations with both the cosmetic and scientific aspects of the medical field was very beneficial. This reference to anatomic specimens provided another context to support the use of silicone for representing body matter, whereas cosmetic surgery provided a commodity perspective on the silicone fat cells. The addition of plastic in the form of a polymer-based thread was influenced by the plastinated cadavers since the blood vessels on display at the aforementioned exhibition were plastic (positive space) mouldings of the blood vessel network of the body (von Hagens 2009:26).

The reference to silicone in both the practical component of this research as well as a slight reference to the medical field strengthened the argument but lessened the impact of my pieces being regarded as jewellery objects. Being aware of established basics within the field of contemporary jewellery requires an approach where ornate design and the creation of



precious objects are paramount. Consequently, producing body adornment considered outside the ambit of contemporary jewellery presented problematic insinuations as this study progressed, particularly where the wearable attributes of my pieces were a minor consideration.

Body fat, in its most literal sense, does not attract the same attention as conventional representations of jewellery. Some viewers would find the literal depiction of fat repulsive and the keen association to anatomical models seems to alienate the work further. Zellweger eliminated this problem by creating his morphology of fat cells out of glass. This medium had a less graphic association with the body and was easily classified as a jewel. Producing the fat cells out of a medium which bears visual and physical links to the real matter makes the work difficult to perceive of as a jewel. For this reason the description of 'adornment' had been adopted by this research for the practical component, yet there exists a very obvious contradiction in the motivation in creating the pieces and their relative function.

Although the intention for this work would be to value it as a form of contemporary jewellery, there is a very keen intention for the work to be seen as transgressing the boundary which exists between contemporary jewellery and contemporary sculpture. In motivating that the work need not be worn on the body already implies that contemporary jewellery is not necessarily the desired approach for the work. It should be noted though that contemporary jewellery does accommodate the description of 'objects' where the wearable function is not a necessity (Grant 2005:7). The difference between this circumstance and the situation presented by the fat cells adornment would be the close link to the literal body matter and a focus on abjection as motivation for this aesthetic.

Jewellery, even contemporary jewellery is conventionally attractive. Less aesthetically appealing works emphasise their value in terms of an intimate body relationship. The practical component of this research does not place focus on emotional value but rather acknowledges that fat is already part of the body and what happens to it once it is discarded is important. Therefore the ornate element of contemporary jewellery is denied and the pieces adopt an anti-jewellery appeal. Although this description is not widely employed in

current contemporary jewellery discourse, an understanding of the function this work serves to the broader context of contemporary jewellery does exist. This is seen in the book *Jewelry Concepts and Technology* compiled by Oppi Untracht (1982). Under the heading of "A polarized convocation of jewellers" (11-12) it is stated:

To the left of the artist-jeweler is the rebel jeweler, the radical of the avant-garde, a pioneer in reform who challenges established concepts of design, subject suitability, materials, etc. At the extreme left are the nihilist jewelers, some of whom think that all jewelry is decadent and superfluous, and should be abolished, and that all we need is the illusion of jewelry. Antijewelry jewelers are also necessary because in a culturally free society, following the eternal cycle of creation, flowering, destruction, and re-creation, negation ultimately brings forth an affirmative response. (1982:12).

In this sense the work could be regarded as contemporary sculpture in a similar way to the idea of a cadaver being valued as sculptural artworks because of its aesthetic appeal (von Hagens 2009:35). The contradiction is found very specifically where the word 'adornment' is used. Even though the wearable function is relative and the pieces are claimed to be valued equally as objects, the word 'adornment' implies a literal link to the body and therefore reinserts the fat cells within a contemporary jewellery context. Thus the anti-jewellery becomes jewellery because it conforms – however slight to the function of being worn.

Contemporary jewellery is a field of the jewellery industry which promotes an expanded perception of what constitutes a jewel. This field is therefore an experimental one and what results from it is meant to provoke further discussion of the relationship wearers have with objects imbued with emotive value. When the body-object relationship is being considered in contemporary jewellery the experimentation tends to be reflected in manifestations of the body being mimicked and documented as wearable objects. The approach of anti-jewellery jewellery to contemporary jewellery is not unique and it generally applies when a body discourse forms the locus of the conceptual element of the wearable objects. Being classified as contradictory therefore requires that a strong link to each of the competing categories the work is positioned within should be validated.

### 4.3 Chapter summary

This chapter has dealt with the development of the practical component. Relating the practical work to the theory of this research requires an understanding of what contemporary jewellery is. It also stands to reason that since the word jewellery is used, the object classified as such should be wearable. In contrast the work produced as part of this research promotes the idea that the wearable feature of fat cell adornment is relative thus opening the work up to interpretation. The interpretation implied is dealt with in terms of the materials used in the creation of the fat cell adornments and also their aesthetics. Thus the classification of anti-jewellery jewellery is adopted since the work both denies and yet conforms to the contemporary jewellery rhetoric mostly through the pieces being described as adornment but functioning as a sculptural object with which the audience is encouraged to interact rather than only to wear.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

In conclusion the overall aim of this study was to investigate the viability and value of the morphology of fat as adornment. This aim was achieved through the following developments.

This thesis started with a brief account of the historical development of contemporary jewellery, with a focus on the manifestation of the body as an area of research as well as inspiration. Furthermore, the concept of the gaze has been indicated as being of great importance. I provided an interpretation of this concept in my approach to the undesirable body type more commonly referred to as obesity, particularly as this subject matter is frequently presented in contemporary visual media.

The approach of Gijs Bakker's contemporary jewellery indicates a specific interest in the body shape. The body is presented as fragments in his work with the aim of repositioning and repurposing images of limbs. This particular practice highlighted the very important impact which 'the gaze' has in relation to the body and adornment. The gaze is constituted as a one-sided relationship between an object and a viewer (subject). Yet it is crucial to this research to note that there is a type of gaze enacted on us, the subject, which prompts feelings of ambivalence (Bryson 1988:89).

I offered a possible method of dealing with this ambivalence through the work of Lauren Kalman's Spectacular in which the altered body is perceived as sexualised through the use of lingerie but of an unconventional design. The unconventional/non-normative body type is 'owned' in the wearing of this lingerie mimicking the undesirable body-condition elephantiasis, yet is still subject to spectacle because a disempowering gaze is present. The wearer is in possession of a modified body, similar to Bakker's revalued imaged limbs, but both methods are considered superficial when considering fat cells as the focal point of this research. A more invasive approach to the body was required.

Where Bakker chose to hint at the body through images and Kalman recreated an undesirable body type as an object of fetishist voyeurism, the recipient of elective surgery has the option of 'correcting flaws' at the root of its imperfection. The body becomes an interface at this stage and ownership is exacted in a more direct way than in the examples given in Chapter 2 (Bakker, Melland, and Kalman). The decision for elective surgery is spurred on by intentions to emulate a body ideal. This ideal is often influenced through popular culture which represents a different form of biopower considered in Chapter 2. In the popular culture context, biopower promotes a body ideal seemingly unrelated to health consciousness and more focused on a standard, appealing body type formed through the emphasis on certain physiological elements such as facial features or body weight (Sturken & Cartwright 2001:97).

The French artist Orlan chose to interpret these ideals by physically altering her facial features to conform to beauty ideals inspired by females of famous paintings. Through this process she critiqued the result of cosmetic facial enhancement surgery by having two artificial shapes implanted on her forehead, rendering her appearance non-normative and, through documenting the surgical procedures, stripped the result of cosmetic procedures of their glamour and presented the process of acquiring an ideal body as abject (Heartney 2004:227). Norman Cherry proposed that adornment could be grown from the wearer's own body matter and inserted as a biologically integrated modification, yet aesthetically similar to the implants on Orlan's forehead (Cherry 2006).

Incorporating the work of Christoph Zellweger is pivotal since his latest contribution to contemporary jewellery bears a conceptual similarity to research undertaken in this study. A parallel can be seen between Zellweger's decision to create fat cells from blown glass and the practical component of this study to mimic abject body matter as realistically as possible. Zellweger chooses to highlight the emotional value association of loss in the cosmetic procedure of liposuction and the glass volumes presented as fat cells act as receptacles of this abstract value (Presentation s.a.). However, Zellweger's approach to representing fat cells as ornate jewellery masks the 'real' appearance of this abject body matter which also shadows the ambivalence highlighted earlier when regarding this body

matter as spectacle. Therefore interest in depicting a 'real' version of non-normative bodies and thus body matter was developed in this research.

Throughout Chapter 4 I motivated that there is no euphemism for the topic of body fat, and the mere mention of this substance prompts thoughts more likely to be associated with fat cell extraction and modification of the body. Fat is vilified by society and is often deemed too sensitive for discussion. This knowledge did not deter my desire to continue with the investigation of this body matter but rather the ambivalence associated with exacting control over the body was embraced. In fact, varying opinions about this topic in conversation as well as efforts to translate my ideas into tangible objects encouraged a desire to enlighten viewers of my work on how fat cells can become an object outside the body and is capable of containing meaning. Although idealistic, the intention in creating visual replicas of the abject body matter of fat cells was aimed at drawing attention to this component of the body, with a view to bestowing it with a meaning similar to any other sample of body decoration that is imbued with significance.

Contemporary jewellery had initially been the objective in the creation of the accompanying works, yet what was being proposed by this research moved beyond the trivial signifiers that jewels are conventionally associated with. Emphasising fat cells as the 'medium' and not just a feature in an adornment, required moving away from the confines of conventional jewellery discourse to a certain extent. Integrating the body in a literal sense rather than romanticising it meant that ornate design would not play a primary role. This resonates with von Hagens' Body Worlds exhibition where the intention is to offer uncompromised information on the body (von Hagens 2009:35).

The practical component employed careful integration of anatomical design with a fairly vivid depiction of body matter in the proposed adornment. The grotesque materiality of the body was highlighted as opposed to what is conventionally considered appealing. This approach diverges from any work I have become accustomed to and although the new-found visual freedom was liberating, there was also a down-side. The down-side is that the idea proposed by Zellweger, that the body itself be perceived as adornment, may not be easily accepted because the subject matter of fat is a sensitive issue in contemporary

society where idealised bodies are preferred and anything beyond conventional jewellery representation is often disregarded.

The approach was therefore adopted to classify adipose adornment as anti-jewellery jewellery. The classification of anti-jewellery-jewellery is aimed at validating the reference to a grotesque, pseudo realistic materiality of fat cells as being visually different from conventional jewellery but because of its close association with the body, warrants use as adornment and valuation as a non-normative jewellery object. It is also hoped that this research together with the accompanying practical work will prompt the viewer to re-assess body fat from being a negative attribute of the body to warrant being imbued with meaning similar to the way conventional jewels are valued.



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