

# PERFORMING JEWELLERY

*jewellery, decoration, gender and performance.*

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## Abstract

This essay is about the act of wearing contemporary jewellery has as a way of communication between human beings. I investigate the act of decorating the body as an important and basic human need.

This essay investigates the relationship between gender, feminine culture, and decoration within the Western world, thinking of jewellery as a socialisation method and not as a consequence of natural differences between sexes.<sup>1</sup>

This investigation presents a brief historical review of the role that jewellery has been playing in the relations between the genders and the changes it has undergone in terms of cultural process over the last centuries. I introduce to the reader the idea of performing jewellery with the aim of to highlight the relevance that decoration on the body has as a way to construct our identity.

The post-structuralist theories about gender and identity made by the feminist philosopher Judith Butler (Gender Trouble 1990, Undoing Gender 2004), and some philosophical perspectives on material culture, are used to support my investigation, to postulate that jewellery pieces can be viewed or understood us as '*queer apparatus*'... As a way to explore and experience jewellery as a '*queer apparatus*', I have chosen few examples of contemporary jewellery.

Key words:

Femininity / Intimacy - public / attraction - bewilderment / gender / bodily-body / identity / performativity / wearability / decorating.

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<sup>1</sup>Ruth Burnes and Joanne Budolz Eicher. Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts. Oxford: Berg, 1992, p.1.

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## Introduction

The ways in which society in the Western world has been relating to *jewellery*, *body* and *gender* in culture concern me a jewellery maker working in the field of Contemporary Art Jewellery today. Thus, I explore the possibilities that humans have to construct individuals and common realities by the act of decorating the body and interacting within the society to which we conform. Stressing the decorative practices on the body involves a strong symbolic and communicative load into a social environment.

This reflections starts by presenting a brief review, where I will focus on the work of a few art historians who have provided a historical discourse on a particular socio-cultural behaviour in relation to the use of jewellery over the last decades in the western world.

The idea of performing jewellery is presented using the gender and identity theories of the American philosopher Judith Butler (1990, 2004) in order to support the idea that performing contemporary jewellery is a resource to perform our identity as well, as well as to understand contemporary jewellery as a tool for the fostering of especially traversal connections between humans beings.

Finally I will draw a connection between the term “queer”, intended as something uncanny and unconventional, and jewellery medium; in the final section of this essay, through carefully selected examples from the field, I will in fact clarify how or from what perspective, the jewellery medium could be intended as a potential ‘queer apparatus’, something that defies gender and / or social conventions.

## Decorating bodies with Jewellery

*“More than any other functional object, jewellery is related to people”*.<sup>2</sup>

There is no one civilisation, as long as human beings have existed, that has not focused on the body as the principal place for the practice of ornamentation as a symbolic act. No date can be put on the first use of jewellery on the body<sup>3</sup>. All cultures throughout the history of human beings have assigned unusually high value to jewels, the act of decorating bodies with jewellery has been defined through different high values which varies vary spiritually, emotionally, materially, economically, and politically from one culture to another. This implies that jewellery is an imprint of the time, representing a truly objective atmosphere of the time and context of its creation, taking place on our bodies as part of the reality we experience, hence taking part of our lives. Thus, from the origins of the humanity, jewellery has played a role of connectivity throughout symbolic representation, responding to our most primitive urges as humans beings.

“The nature of jewellery is bound to reflect in some measure the structure and activities of the society in which it [is] ...current”<sup>4</sup>. As the English archaeologist Graham Clark argues, not only is the study of jewellery useful in the context of its culture, but it is also for a critique of culture that arises from an interpretation of its jewellery. This approach will help to understand that the use of jewellery can not only be used to decorate the body, it can also be a way of expression and connectivity in its ability to communicate not only biographical references of the wearer but also the aims and aspirations of the wearer, thereby performing the wearer’s identity.

( Fig.1)

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<sup>2</sup> Liesbeth den Besten,

<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Ross Russell. *Gender and Jewelry. A Feminist Analysis*. ICGtesting, Tufts University, USA. 2010, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Grahame Clark, *Symbols of Excellence: Precious Materials as Expressions of Status* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.166.

## Historical introduction of performing jewellery.

I present this brief historical overview in order to describe the changing nature of the position of jewellery in society whereby the use of jewellery as a decorative object was initially performed by both men and women, and how the use of jewellery later shifted to the feminine sphere, and thereby gaining a gendered aspect within Western culture.

According to the British art historian Hugh Tait, in his book '7000 years of Jewellery', edited by the British Museum, the eighteenth century was still a period where both men and women wore jewellery at the same level. He explained that during the early eighteenth century, Western European court men rivalled women with their gemstones, buttons, buckles, badges, shoulder ribbons and so on.<sup>5</sup> According to Tait, jewellery was worn in certain economical and political aspects of the higher strata in the society of that time. Another interesting data about apparel and attire even before, during the sixteenth century, is described by the English clergyman, William Harrison, in his text titled 'Description Of Elizabethan England', from 1577, where he expresses his personal approach to the apparel of that time in his country, saying :

*"For my part, I can tell better how to inveigh against this enormity than describe any certainty of our attire; sith pearl, in their ears, whereby they imagine the workmanship of God not to be a little amended. But herein they rather disgrace than adorn their persons, as by their niceness in apparel, for which I say most nations do not unjustly deride us...herein we be like to the polypus or chameleon; and thereunto bestow most cost upon our arses, and much more than upon all the rest of our bodies, as women do likewise upon their heads and shoulders, In women also, it is most to be lamented, that they do now far exceed the lightness of our men (who nevertheless are transformed from the cap even to the very shoe)"<sup>6</sup>.*

This aspect of his quote is of particular note: "...sith pearl, in their ears, whereby they imagine the workmanship of God not to be a little amended. But herein they rather disgrace than adorn their persons, as by their niceness in apparel, for which I say most nations do not unjustly deride us"...

Harrison clearly expresses his way of seeing the act of decorating the male body with jewellery as negative behaviour at that time, even if it was a practice of some honoured members of that society. Men during that time still were performing themselves and calling attention to their distinctive identities by wearing jewellery even if it was apparently seen as unacceptable masculine behaviour. One good example of a man who apparently stood strongly against this kind of opinion of that time is Sir Walter Raleigh, an explorer, soldier, poet and favoured courtier of Queen Elizabeth I of England. The following portrait of him illustrates this moment of history when jewellery was still worn by both men and women.

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<sup>5</sup> Hugh Tait. "7000 Years of Jewellery". The British Museum Press. London, UK, 1986, p.11.

<sup>6</sup> William Harrison, Description Of Elizabethan England, 1577.  
<http://www.blackmask.com> , p.30.

(Fig.2)

(Fig.2) A portrait in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery in London of Sir Walter Raleigh.

Later, in the nineteenth century and in response to industrial capitalism of the Victorian age, it is possible to see that gender roles were developed with very marked tendencies to frame jewellery mostly in the female sphere. While men renounced the act of wearing conspicuous jewels as they were doing before, women continued to develop this practice. The two following images illustrate how women in the Victorian era wore prominent jewellery. This is evident in the texts of Charles Dickens, in "Little Dorrit's", where he presents narrowly rigid gender roles as situated within the capitalist value system of his novels.<sup>7</sup>

Through examining how jewellery was worn or used by the Western society during those centuries, the role of jewellery shows a clear connection to the woman's body and, therefore, with gender playing a relevant role that is still affecting the appreciation of the act of wearing jewellery today. The wearing of jewellery is seen as a feminine behaviour. Thus, most men in the Western world see a risk of feminization<sup>8</sup> by wearing jewellery. A man apparently chose to show his purchasing power by adopting a tendency to use the body of his wife as a place to exhibit his economic wealth. Women's bodies turned into a kind of capital bosom to hang jewels upon.<sup>9</sup> This unspoken status of jewellery was progressively acquired since the act of the decoration was strongly attacked as a negative and pejorative behaviour associated with the feminine culture during the following century in Western society.

(Fig.3)

(Fig.4)

(Fig.3) Victorian lady wearing a vulcanite hand brooch on her lacy necklace and faceted jet bracelet on her arm. *Carte de visite* size 2-1/2" by 4-1/8", marked W.J. Wellsted & Son, 19 & 20 Paragon St, Hull on both front and back, and "Photographers of the Prince & Princess of Wales"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jean Arnold, *Victorian Jewelry, Identity, and the Novel: Prisms of Culture*. Ashgate Publishing, London, 2013, p.15.

<sup>8</sup> Rebecca Ross Russell, *Gender and Jewelry, A feminist Analysis*. ICG testing 2009, p.20.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Arnold, *Victorian Jewelry, Identity, and the Novel: Prisms of Culture*. Ashgate Publishing, London, 2013, p.15.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.morninggloryantiques.com/JewelChatVictJwl.htm> Visited on 15/02/14

(Fig.4) Victorian lady wearing elaborate jet necklace and brooch. *Carte de visite* marked "March 1874" in pencil and "F. G. Earl, Photographic Artist, Worcester & Malvern".<sup>11</sup>

## The feminine Culture

*"The construction of femininity is historical. It is lived by women economically, socially and ideologically".*<sup>12</sup>

Within Modernism, the feminine culture was one of the most inspirational motivations in the development of the aesthetic in Art Nouveau.<sup>13</sup> The female figure often appeared in Art Nouveau as a fantastic creature in Art Nouveau most distinctive motifs, along with nature. The British design historian Penny Sparke states that it was during Modernism that the feminine culture was directly linked to the decorative and the crafts.<sup>14</sup>

The Modernist avant-garde theories against the *decorative* and, consequently, against femininity, were formulated by men taking the position to determine what was valid or disapproved. During this time, feminine culture was trivialised and marginalised especially by architects' voices.<sup>15</sup> As an example, it is proven that the *decorative* was strongly attacked and devalued by Adolf Loos in his essay "Ornament and Crime" written in 1908 from his architectural perspective. Another case is the architect Le Corbusier's claims about women, in which he affirms that women were responsible for the decline in decorative arts. He writes as follows:

*"So young ladies became crazy about decorative art-poker-work, metal work, embroidery. Girls' boarding schools made room for periods of applied Art and the History in their timetables. ...At this point it looked as if decorative art would founder among young ladies, had not the exponents of decorative ensemble wished to show, in making their name and establishing their profession, that male abilities were indispensable in this field: considerations of ensemble, organisation, sense of unity, balance, proportion, harmony".*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Idem.

<sup>12</sup> Parker, Rozsika and Pollock Griselda, *Old Mistresses, Women, Art and Ideology*, Rivers Oram Press Limited, London, 1981, p.114.

<sup>13</sup> Penny Sparke, "As long as It's Pink" *The sexual Politics of Taste*. The Press of the Nova Scotia, College of Art and Design. Nova Scotia, Canada, 2011. See Chapter 5, *Letting in the Air: Women and Modernism*.

<sup>14</sup> idem.

<sup>15</sup> Idem, p. 85.

<sup>16</sup>Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987, p.36.

In this quote, the aspects of femininity related to the decorative is clearly defined by Le Corbusier as a consequence of great previous work attributed to men. So by saying this, he not only positions men at a higher level in terms of intellectual abilities, he also gives men a more powerful position with respect to the great success that the decorative arts acquired during Art Nouveau, and thereby contributes to the devaluation of the feminine culture in the minds of the Western world.

In searching for other approaches as to how feminine culture was treated and how the use of jewellery has changed over the centuries since the beginning of human history, it is important to mention the words of Dutch art historian Liesbeth den Besten in her recent book 'On jewellery'. She writes that according to Roland Barthes, in the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance period, women and men both wore gemstones alike, stating that, "It was only in modern times that jewellery became exclusively associated with women and gradually gained a negative connotation - women having a marginalised social position but also the power of being the living showcase of their husbands".<sup>17</sup> According to the British art historian Jean Arnold, it is possible to see that, similarly to what Besten confirms about the relationship between women, the jewellery worn by women, and men, was a clear relationship rooted already in the Victorian era, whereby the feminine body served as the showcase of the wealth of males, consolidating this feminine connotation of jewellery during the Modernist era.

## Jewellery and The Feminine body

*"The arts which come into contact with the "body", whether they be useful or not, have had always a significantly lower status, and as chance would have it, the greater part of them have feminine connotations (weaving, lacework, embroidery, sewing, jewellery, etc.)".<sup>18</sup>*

Curiously, the same has happened with art made exclusively by women throughout history. Additionally, it is notable that the pejorative use of the word 'decorative'<sup>19</sup> appears throughout history in relation to the female sphere as well. Anyway this issue will not be treated here in this essay. Going back to the historical review I have presented here, it is clear that the relation between *jewellery* and the *feminine body* has a long tradition. As it has been said by the art historians quoted above, jewellery has been socially connected with the feminine sphere as well as linked towards a negative aspect. Thus, the pejorative connotation that jewellery and the feminine have acquired, could be also related to the poststructuralist work of Judith Butler, where she says the attack on the imaginary of the female body is an attack on a specific Western tradition, which is not universal<sup>20</sup>. It is

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<sup>17</sup> Liesbeth Den Besten, "On Jewellery", A Compendium of International Contemporary Art Jewellery. Arnoldsche Art Publishers, Stuttgart, Germany, 2011. p, 21.

<sup>18</sup> Isabelle Bernier, "In the Shadow of Contemporary Art", *Feministe toi-même, féministe quand même*. Ed. Nicole Jolicoeur and Isabelle Bernier, trans. S.D. Hassan (Quebec: La Chambre Blanche, 1986), pp.52-8. In: *Feminism-Art-Theory, An Anthology 1968-2000*. Blackwell Publishers, Massachusetts, USA, 2001.p,43..

<sup>19</sup> Valerie Jaudon and Joyce Kozloff, "Art Hysterical", *Notions of progress and Culture*. 1978.p, 168. In: *Feminist Art-Theory. An Anthology 1968-2000*. Edited by Hilary Robison. Blackwell Publishers, USA. 2001.

<sup>20</sup>Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble", *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, London, 1990.

probable that this attack against the feminine is a consequence of a traditional way of thinking rooted in a society that had suffered a strong patriarchal legacy.

Proposals such as the idea that a lack of ornament is a sign of a powerful intellect<sup>21</sup> have strongly affected the way we look at jewellery in our current day. The trivialisation and downgrading of ornamentation and of feminine culture as well, reflect in some way that the act of decorating the body as a human practice has been devalued as a powerful ritual which, in the past, played an important role since the origins of humanity. In any case, the feminine body has been a recurrent source of inspiration for arts and crafts, and this can be seen not only as inspirational motive but also as the most common place for showcasing traditional jewellery as we look back over the centuries.

## Performing Contemporary Jewellery and Gender.

*“Gender in culture must be understood through socialisation that males and females undergo as part of developing and identity”.*<sup>22</sup>

The work of Judith Butler, in particular ‘Gender Trouble’ and ‘Undoing Gender’, is of importance in understanding the concept of performativity of gender as a way to construct identity. What Butler proposes with respect to how gender is built, works as a support to the main idea in this essay - by wearing contemporary jewellery, or said in another way, by *decorating our bodies* with contemporary jewellery, we also experience the performativity of ourselves. It is in this performativity that it is possible to define a new order, and in particular, one of gender, when we allow ourselves to display the identity we have chosen to perform in our everyday lives without framing the act of decorating the body as a feminine behaviour or as belonging to the female sphere, as it has been mostly seen during the past centuries within the use of traditional jewellery.

*“The performance by means of which our bodies become gendered, varies in different contexts, and can change over time”*<sup>23</sup>.

The definition of gender as a performative act that Butler proposes, in which reality is produced as an effect of its own performativity, is related to the norms that govern society, which defines what is real and what is not, and what will or will not be intelligible. As Butler states, sexual or gender identity is not established at birth. Rather, we are labelled as either masculine or feminine by the culture into which we are introduced. When we learn to speak and recognise ourselves as “he” or

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<sup>21</sup> Adolf Loos, *Ornament und Verbrechen*. In: *Programme und Manifeste zur Architektur des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Ed. Ulrich Conrads. Braunschweig 1981, pp.15-21. In: *Thinking Jewellery, On the way towards a Theory of Jewellery*, Wilhelm Lindenmann (Ed) & FH Trier / Idar-Oberstein. Arnoldsche Art Publishers, Stuttgart, Germany, 2011. p, 128.

<sup>22</sup> Ruth Burnes and Joanne Buboldz Eicher. “Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts”. Oxford: Berg, 1992, p.1.

<sup>23</sup> Kathleen Lennon, *Feminist Perspectives on the Body*. 5.1 Performativity and Materiality of the Body. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, fall 2010 Edition. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/>

“she”, as a son or a daughter, for example, we are placed into these roles<sup>24</sup>. If we look to the act of performing a jewel as an extension of the body, we are not only decorating our bodies, we are also creating a strong option to perform ourselves as individuals in a society where we are otherwise treated as a mass. By performing through jewellery our identities as individuals, it becomes possible to break those norms that define what should be understood as feminine or masculine. Considering that the interrelation between gender and objects is one of the most fundamental components of the culture framework which holds together our sense of social identity,<sup>25</sup> it is possible to experience a freedom of communication and connectivity through the act of performing and choosing these objects as extensions of ourselves.

## Contemporary Art Jewellery as *Queer Apparatus*.

*“Contemporary notions of reality can and should be challenged in order to gain access to be more human”.*<sup>26</sup>

In this section, I use the term ‘*queer apparatus*’ to give a more specific definition of how I understand contemporary art jewellery objects and the use of these jewellery objects as a sort of ‘*queer apparatus*’.

I propose the use of the term queer, considering that it can be related to the way in which that contemporary jewellery can be understood and performed.

The term queer has different definitions depending on how or where it is used. To make things *queer* is certainly to disturb the order of things.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, *queer* could mean anything to anyone who just feels they cannot place themselves in any one specific category. The English word *queer* has as its synonyms “weird”, “strange”, and “uncommon”; it is seen as a system function which is not normative. Hence, it refers to something that extends beyond the frame of how something or someone should be seen or understood. Consequently, it is a matter of what you can do with it, as opposed to what you are supposed to do with it. This is how I use the term queer: as an adjective for the word apparatus, which intend as an object with a function, and I relate it to *contemporary jewellery* since it has, at least from my point of view, the same characteristics. Contemporary jewellery can have different functions - as many as the maker, the wearer, or the viewer can or could intend to add to an object when it is placed on the body of the wearer, and is therefore being performed. Within the post-modernist world, there is a focus on the values of personal pleasures, individual identity, and cultural diversity rather than on those of the standardised masses.<sup>28</sup> The function that objects can acquire, are given by everyone in this society, whom could have the potential to build up different ways of languages, which are not necessarily made through words, but in this case,

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<sup>24</sup> Kathleen Lennon, Feminist Perspectives on the Body. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, fall 2010 Edition. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/>.

<sup>25</sup> Judy Attfield, Wild Things, The material Culture of Everyday Life. Berg, New York, 2000, p.238.

<sup>26</sup> Judith Butler, Undoing Gender. Routledge, New York, USA, 2004, p. 45.

<sup>27</sup> Sara Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology, Orientation, objects, others. Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2006, p. 161.

<sup>28</sup> Penny Sparke, “As long as It’s Pink” The sexual Politics of Taste. The Press of the Nova Scotia, College of Art and Design. Nova Scotia, Canada, 2011, p.171.

through a relation between individuals and the objects on their bodies. This power relationship could constitute an alternative possible course of action.

Social structures are defined largely by the prescribed material culture they involve. More specifically, it is the proper functions of the objects making up the material culture, which define these structures at the most basic level.<sup>29</sup> So, by wearing a 'queer apparatus' that has the potential to break the norms of the idea of how jewellery has to be understood, or how your gender it is being performed through that object, we disrupt the social system using the potentiality that the act of decorating the body with queer apparatus /contemporary jewellery has, as a way to redefine the contemporary notions of reality that every human should challenge.

The following are some examples of contemporary jewellery which can be seen as 'queer Apparatus'.

**Iris Einchenberg.** 1965, Göttingen- Germany.

*"Sexy and repulsive at the same time you need to touch them - wear them and they transform... being placed on the body they meet into the clothes and the body at the same time they long for a body but also long for the person standing in front of you triggering the voyeur in the other"...*

This is a fragment of Eichenberg's statement about her work "Pink Years Later", 2009. Considering the aspect of wearability that the artist is proposing for the objects, there is an intention for her works to be worn as jewels, yet provoking reactions to the viewers, which are not necessarily a specific or defined reaction. These jewels break the traditional way of how a jewel is supposed to look like, if they are compared with the traditional aesthetics of a jewel. These objects, are produced as contemporary jewellery, and they could be understood as 'queer apparatus' as long as they are provoking transformation, from the body of the wearer, and producing different reactions, as many disorientating meanings as possible. Which could be the body for these jewels? Do these jewels have a pre-defined meaning? How could they change on the body of the wearer?

*"Pink Years Later". 2009.*

(Fig.5)

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<sup>29</sup> idem, p. 41.

In these examples of her work, it is possible to see a clear tendency to use ornamental shapes that come from the nature, such as flowers and butterflies. She has chosen to use paper, marble, textiles as materials. The choice of materials and in combination with the body of the wearer, could produce a 'queer apparatus' as an object. These objects could be seen as *queer apparatus*, if they are presented as jewels, then the materiality will probably produce the first state of disorientation, because these materials are not the expected to be used in a piece of jewellery from the perspective of a person who doesn't know that, in contemporary jewellery, those materials could act as precious materials as well. Secondly, the shapes of these objects, are clearly connected with the imaginary of ornamentation, closely connected with a female sphere, but, when worn by men, the meaning it could be also something else, than just a decoration on their bodies. I see these examples of contemporary jewellery as a way to express ideas of gender, by displacing the decorative to men's bodies. If we look to the man who is wearing a big and heavy butterfly made in marble, hanged from his neck (Fig.8), the physical and visual weight of this object could produce another understanding of the object, which is not simply about beauty, but that could be a symbol of decoration, when placed on a man's body, shows to be a choice to perform himself more than to be only a way of decorating himself. This combination between the object (apparatus) and the body could produce an unexpected reaction from the other, the viewer. The wearer perform himself by wearing a 'queer apparatus' that leaves open a bigger meaning of the ornament itself.

(Fig. 6)

## Conclusions

Since culture is in constant change we should also consider to re-think jewellery as a tool to construct new ways of realities and ways of connectivity. The use and relationship with objects like jewels, and the performativity of them through the body, become important elements to contribute to the construction of an identity, in relation with the time we are living in now, where we are experiencing a constant challenge to connect ourselves to others, and that can be reached through performing objects that are incorporated in the body as jewels, contemporary jewels.

In the introduction of this essay, I was focused on the history to find out a reason to understand why the act of decorating the body with jewellery it has been granted a feminine association and its consequences over the last centuries. It has been necessary to do that, to be able to re-think jewellery as a powerful object that could make people perform themselves as individuals in a different ways, thinking contemporary jewellery as a 'queer apparatus', which acts as an extension of the body and by hence allows humans to perform a unique identity. The term 'queer apparatus' was proposed with the intention to open up the endless possibilities of interpretation that a contemporary jewel could have from the perspective of the others, by the viewers. When does it that an *apparatus* can be understood as queer? It happens precisely when bodies are touched by these objects (jewels), and the meaning changes according to the reactions from outside. It would be a mistake to not re-evaluate the possibilities that contemporary jewellery has, as reflection of the reality of our

times. It would also be a mistake to not consider that the act of decorating the body with jewellery, it could be a relevant aspect in the construction of certain gender today.

What does the act of wearing contemporary jewellery provoke?

I conclude after this investigation that the act of decorating our bodies can help us to go back to the origins of humans' needs. Jewellery can be a tool to communicate and to extend our private perception of how things are arranged.

Jewellery in the past had a very marked social connotation associated with gender, it has been playing an important role in Western culture. From a traditional perspective, it has had a *feminine* connotation in the Western society. In contrast to this traditional perspective on jewellery, contemporary jewellery can be an alternative object that could be understood as genderless in itself. Contemporary jewellery's practices can help to restore the original functionality that jewellery had for humans beings in the origins of humanity.

Which body is the body of contemporary jewellery?<sup>30</sup> As it has been shown in this essay, from the beginning of humanity jewellery it was for humans, without a distinction of gender, and for several years the woman's body has been the most common place to display these kind of objects. Since then, contemporary jewellery has renewed the practice and meaning of decoration. Contemporary Jewellery can be performed by everyone without any preconception of the object and its gender, as structures of sexual division. The body is the most common public platform for the performance of contemporary jewellery in public.<sup>31</sup> As Butler states: "there is no necessary link between gender and any particular bodily shape", the same it could be said in relation with to the use of contemporary jewellery and the gender of who is performing his/her identity with it.

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<sup>30</sup> Namita Gupta Wiggers, In: Contemporary Jewelry in Perspective. Edited by Damian Skinner and Art Jewelry Forum. Sterling Publishing. NY, 2013, p.70.

<sup>31</sup> Idem.

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**(Fig.2)** <http://nationalgallery.co.uk> National Portrait Gallery, Portrait of Sir William Raleigh.

**(Fig.3)** <http://www.morninggloryantiques.com/JewelChatVictJwl.html> Victorian lady wearing a vulcanite hand brooch on her lacy necklace and faceted jet bracelet on her arm. *Carte de visite* size 2-1/2" by 4-1/8", marked W.J. Wellsted & Son, 19 & 20 Paragon St, Hull on both front and back, and "Photographers of the Prince & Princess of Wales" Visited on 15/02/14

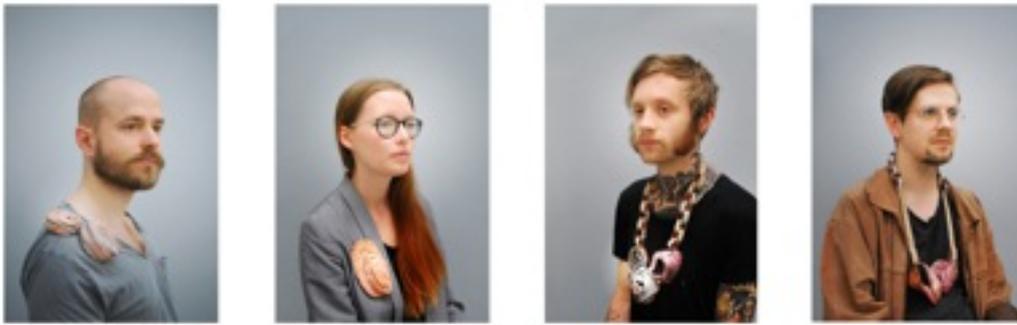
**(Fig.4)** <http://www.morninggloryantiques.com/JewelChatVictJwl.html> Victorian lady wearing elaborate jet necklace and brooch. *Carte de visite* marked "March 1874" in pencil and "F. G. Earl, Photographic Artist, Worcester & Malvern". Visited on 15/02/14

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## Appendix

### Portable Pleasures,

*When intimacy became public.*



In relation with the time we are living in now, where culture is in constant change, we are experiencing a continuous challenge; to connect ourselves to others. That can be reached through performing objects that are incorporated in the body as it happens when wearing jewels. By decorating our bodies with jewellery, we experience the performativity of ourselves. Our private world becomes visible through the choice of wearing determinate objects in the public realm.

All cultures throughout the history of human beings have assigned unusually high value to jewels. The act of decorating bodies with jewellery has been defined through different high values which vary spiritually, emotionally, materially, economically, and politically from one culture to another. This implies that jewellery is an imprint of the time, representing a truly objective atmosphere of the time and context of its creation.

If people relate to the world through things, wearing a jewel, becomes a choice, bringing the personal to the public space. And when this happens; *the act of decorating the body with a jewel*, becomes an important element, to manifest our identity.

As humans beings, we extend ourselves through objects, as part of the reality we experience in order to act in this world. Jewellery then, works as a tool of extension, to construct new ways of realities; new ways of connectivity and not only as ornamentation.

Thus, from the origins of the humanity, jewellery has played an important role of communication throughout symbolic representation, responding to our most primitive and personal urges as humans beings. So then to wear objects like jewellery, is bringing the chance to show, in a public way, a intimate part of us; interacting and communicating with others in society.

In my master's degree project, I decided to collect worn socks as initial material choice. Material that came from both women and men, anonymous identities, people I did not actually know. Along this process, I have transformed the socks into shapes that refers to the intimacy of a female's bodies, looking for questioning *What happens when a shape reminds us of an sexual area of the human body and is displaced to the public sphere, in the form of a jewel?* I have chosen to refer to a physical part of the human body, that everyone in every culture, could recognise, as an intimate part of a woman body.

The physical intimacy of the body shapes that my work evoke, are taken here, in one way, to questioning the negative connotations that the act of wearing jewellery has acquired over the last centuries in the Western Culture.

The trivialisation and downgrading of decoration and of feminine culture as well, reflect in some way that the act of *decorating the body, as a human practice*, has been devalued as a powerful ritual which, since the origins of humanity, played an important role.

In any case, the female body has been a recurrent source of inspiration for arts and crafts, and this can be seen not only as inspirational motive but also as the most common place for showcasing traditional jewellery as we look back over the centuries.

My work challenge such conventions and connotations, and proposes that the action of wearing jewellery today, largely considered as feminine prerogative demeanour, should be accepted by society as a human behaviour and not as a specific choice, defined by gender.

Through this project I investigate how jewellery, intended as an 'apparatus' of communication and disorientation, can launch new ways of understanding, that *the act of decorating the body with jewellery*, is a manifest. A manifest of how culture is reflected and incorporated into the body, becoming naturalised in the form of taste, demeanour and appearance.

But what I mean with the term 'apparatus'?, its a different way to refer to my own work. Apparatus is an instrument. Apparatus it is an invention, a tool to be **worn**, to be used, an extension of the body, an outfit. So, *Apparatus* is to me, something that has a function, which enables a particular and unique articulation, produced between the object and the behaviour of the wearer. The apparatus does not only has one intention, but its own shape and materiality trigger in both; the viewer and wearer, many different reactions and thoughts, which are based on individual backgrounds and personal experiences. So, each one will have a different type of interaction with the 'apparatus'.

In order to understand better what this apparatus can provoke or communicate, I took the pieces with me in a trip to Chile, the place where I grow up. I thought it was of importance for me to experience the effects of these jewels, by wearing them in a different cultural environment than here. After this experience, is when I could understand this objects as 'apparatus'. Performing them in a different social context allowed me to perceive a sense of rejection and at the same time attraction

from the viewers. People from different backgrounds reacted in various ways. There were moments of curiosity, attraction, disorientation, and maybe a mixture of feelings. Some of them were able to say something, some others were in silence and curious. That is exactly what I am looking for, within those objects; to provoke attraction and at the same time bewilderment: a reaction. And from this starting point, to create, much more questionings and intriguing thoughts about the sense of wearing these pieces and how they can transform their function in relation with the context and with the identity of the wearer, and make people out of the field of contemporary jewellery, to be aware that other kind of jewellery and decoration of the body is possible.

So, by wearing an '*apparatus*' that has the potential to break the norms of the idea of how jewellery has to be understood, or how your gender it is being performed through that object. It is possible to disrupt the social system, using the potentiality that has the act of decorating the body with an apparatus, or saying in another way: with contemporary jewellery, as a way to redefine the contemporary notions of reality that every human should challenge. So then it is possible to define a new order, and in particular, one of gender, when we allow ourselves to display the identity we have chosen to perform through the act of decorating the body with jewellery, without linking this choice only as a phenomena that belongs to the female's sphere.

When wearing and performing these apparatus/jewels in a social context, the *border* between intimacy and the public is broken. Provoking a reaction, in this case whether passive or active, positive or negative, from the body of the wearer, towards the perception of the viewer, inciting both; attraction and/or bewilderment, together with a sense of disorientation is then the function of these apparatus.

The dynamic relationship between the intimate and the public that is produced during *the act of wearing a jewel*, have direct relevance in contextualising our individuality in everyday life, considering the social relations beyond the personal.

Thus, my work is not only about challenging the notions of intimacy and public realm, or questioning the trivialisation the the act of decorating the body with jewellery has acquired related to feminine but is also about the heritage of traditional aspects of jewellery that can be re-thought, re-understood, re-considered and ultimately re-established in a contemporary sense, to address issues in society.

The act of decorating the body with these jewels, leaves the viewer with no choice but that of crossing the boundary of the wearer's intimacy. Can this act create a new order of connectivity and communication between both the wearer of those jewellery/ apparatus and the viewer that is forced to confront it?

The series of jewels 'Portable Pleasures' challenge the notions of intimacy and public realm, two aspects that are involved in the act of wearing jewellery in society. In my master's degree project, I investigate how jewellery, intended as an 'apparatus' of communication and disorientation, can be related to the feminine by the morphologic aspect of it. What happens when a shape reminds us of an intimate area of the human body and is displaced to the public sphere, in the form of a jewel?

The act of decorating the body with these jewels, leaves the viewer with no choice but that of crossing the boundary of the wearer's intimacy. Can this act create a new order of connectivity and communication between both the wearer of that jewellery piece and the viewer that is forced to confront it?

The term 'apparatus' refers here to an instrument: it is an invention, a tool to be worn, to be used, an outfit. Apparatus is here something that has a function, which enables a particular and unique articulation between the form of the object (of the jewel or 'apparatus') and the behaviour of the wearer. The apparatus does not only do what we want it to do, but its own shape and materiality trigger in both the viewer and wearer many different reactions and thoughts, which are based on individual backgrounds and personal experiences. Thus, each individual will have a different type of interaction with the 'apparatus'.

The question of what does the act of wearing contemporary jewellery provoke, has been a constant into this process. I am fascinated by the idea of how the act of wearing and performing apparatus/jewels in a social context, can provoke a certain reaction, whether passive or active, positive or negative, from the body of the wearer (the self), towards the perception of the viewer (the other), inciting both attraction and/or bewilderment, together with a sense of disorientation, inducing to a certain disruption of the social system by redefining the contemporary notions of reality, which every human should challenge.

This project aims at offering the possibility to both the wearer and viewer to challenge social conventions in regards to the feminine and the masculine, and all their various, possible expressions; how could the issue of gender be affected, in contemporary terms, by wearing and performing certain jewels -which I define as 'apparatus' in my thesis- on the body, and how can such jewels influence the construction of a new identity that is produced when we perform these 'apparatus' in daily life context.

American philosopher Judith Butler states, in her book "Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex", 1993, that there is no necessary link between gender and any particular bodily shape; I argue that the same could be said in relation to the use of contemporary jewellery and the gender of who is performing his/her identity with it. The question today is : Which body is the body of contemporary jewellery? <sup>1</sup>

The feminine shapes of the body, are taken here as a way of questioning, on one hand, the negative connotations that the act of wearing jewellery has acquired over the last centuries. My work seeks to challenge such conventions and connotations, and proposes that the action of wearing jewellery, today largely considered a feminine prerogative, should be accepted by society as a human behaviour and not as a specific choice, defined by gender.

## Material Choices and Making Process

I started this project by collecting wearables as initial material choice. Material that came from both women and men, anonymous identities, people I did not actually know. By transforming wearables as initial material into shapes that are connected to the intimacy of a female's body, I investigate the question of what happens when an object, that reminds of the physical intimacy of a certain biological body, is displaced to the public sphere.

The final choices of materials are playing an important role in my practical investigation. I came to them after a long process of intuitive experimentation and exploration within the material I had collected, as a way to re-establish the traditional crafts into a contemporary way of making and thinking them.

It has been of relevance, in my practice, to interpret the traditional craft values of the jewellery field in a more contemporary way; by doing this, I allow conventional materials and techniques to attain more contemporary aesthetics.

I transform and manipulate the initial material's shapes and appearance (fabric from wearables that I had collected and then dipped in plaster) through time-consuming processes and techniques that come from traditional jewellery practices (vitreous enamelling, electroforming, metalwork, and so on). By doing so, I draw a connection between the initial, more intuitive and experimental phase of my project, to the jewellery heritage and materials, like copper, silver and enamel, that I consider important. Combining this traditional jewellery techniques and processes with a more experimental way of making, I am looking forward to highlighting the value of the crafts of making.

The colour of copper is closer to the human skin colour; the natural aspects that it acquires when enamelled, give to my work the aspect of bodily and alive matter that I was looking for, enamelling the copper is giving skin to the shapes made in metal and allow me to explore new dimensions into the enamelling process as well. The transparent vitreous colours of enamel, achieved through particular enamelling techniques, naturally allow for the closest result to the sensual, alive and hummed aspect I desired in this work. The silver brings, with its whiteness, a reflection of purity, the tautological forms that shape up these pieces are symbolic manifestation of a state of purity and flowering of desire in relation to the physical body. The silver affects and works as a reflexive connection within this processes as well.

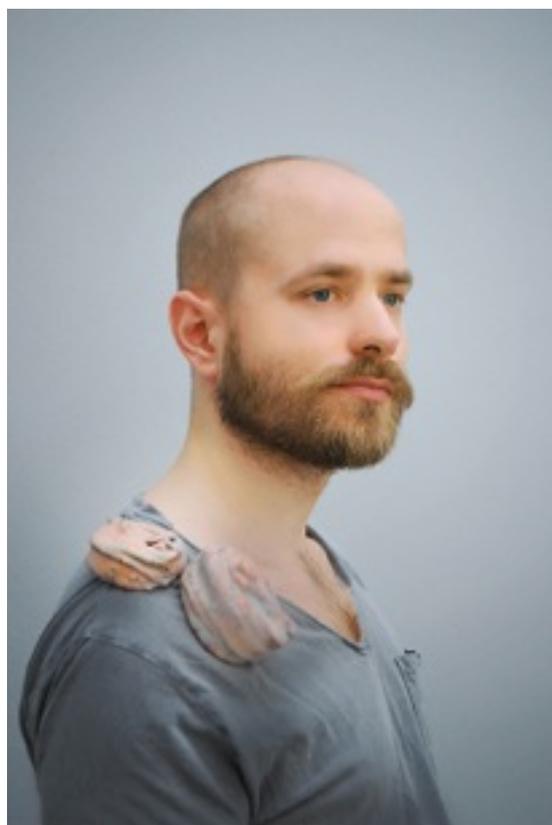
Traditional materials and techniques find space in my work, fine solutions and not fast and easy ones, in order to re-establish a new order of value, at the same time bringing them to a contemporary discourse as well as aesthetics.

Thus, my work is not only about challenging the notions of intimacy and public realm, but is also about the heritage of traditional aspects of jewellery that can be re-thought, re-understood, re-considered and ultimately re-established in a contemporary sense, to address certain issues in society, within the jewellery field.

I would like to point out, that one can, as contemporary jewellery artist, express ideas that refers to the long heritage and tradition of the field of jewellery, by using the same materials and old techniques, which in the past, were used to shape jewellery items mostly towards the feminine sphere. But

today, using them, with a different intentions and contemporary aesthetics. Transforming the worn socks in metal, using traditional jewellery process and materials like vitreous enamel that have had a long presence in the craft of jewellery.

Size and wearability are also important aspects of my work. I make jewellery for the body, and aim to provide the wearer with the possibility to wear these 'apparatus' and to eventually get use to their presence on the body, almost forgetting them. Becoming almost, part of the body. The jewellery I make is not only to be seen by the viewers, but also to be worn and performed by the wearer, for the wearer to extend their way of thinking by wearing these apparatus/objects/ jewels in a daily life context, and building their identities with their jewels bringing the chance to people to connect with each other.



**Portable Pleasures,**

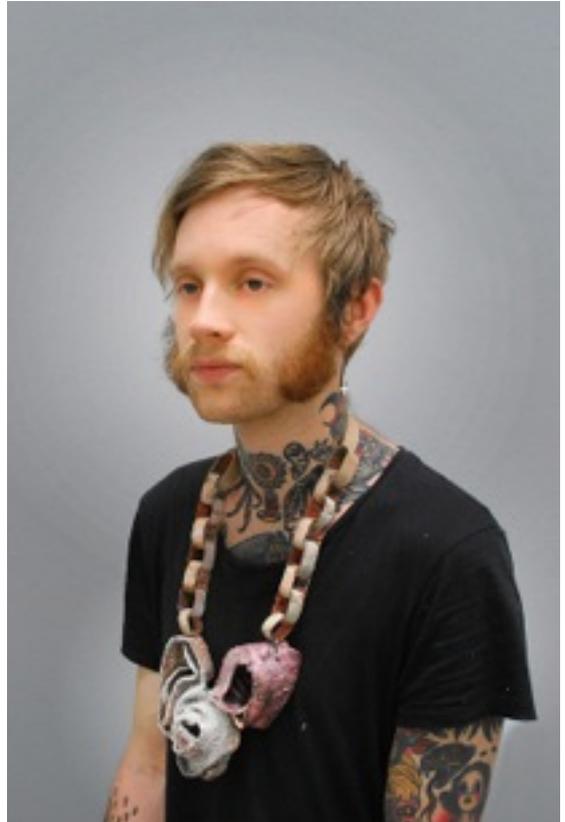
*When Intimacy becomes Public.*

2014

Brooch

Cooper, vitreous enamel, silver, socks. 16 x 7,5 x 5 cm

Photo: Carolina Gimeno©



**Portable Pleasures,**

*When Intimacy becomes Public.*

2014

Necklace

Cooper, silver, vitreous enamel, leather.

15 x 4 x 38 cm

Photo: Carolina Gimeno ©



**Portable Pleasures,**

*When Intimacy becomes Public.*

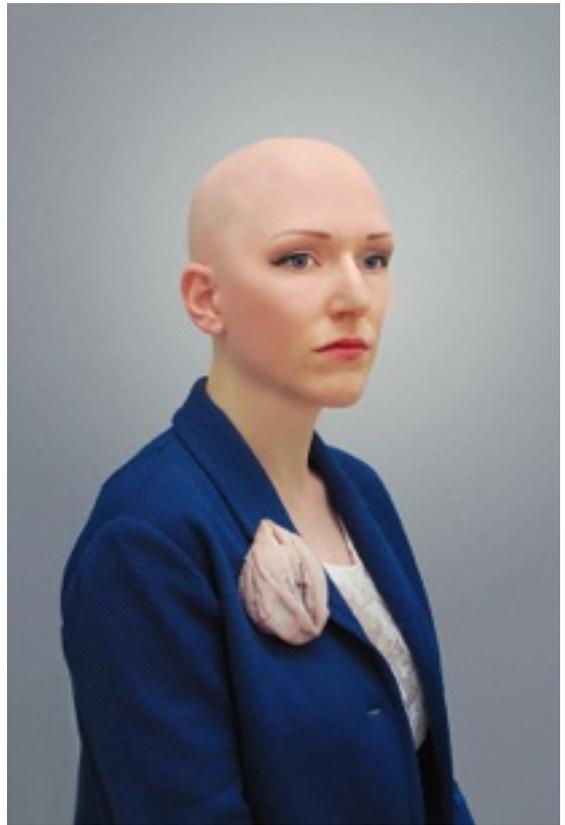
2014

Necklace

Cooper, silver, vitreous enamel, leather.

15 x 4,5 x 41 cm

Photo: Carolina Gimeno ©



**Portable Pleasures,**

*When Intimacy becomes Public.*

2014

Necklace

Cooper, silver vitreous enamel, leather.

15 x 4,5 x 41 cm

Photo: Carolina Gimeno ©



**Portable Pleasures,**

*When Intimacy becomes Public.*

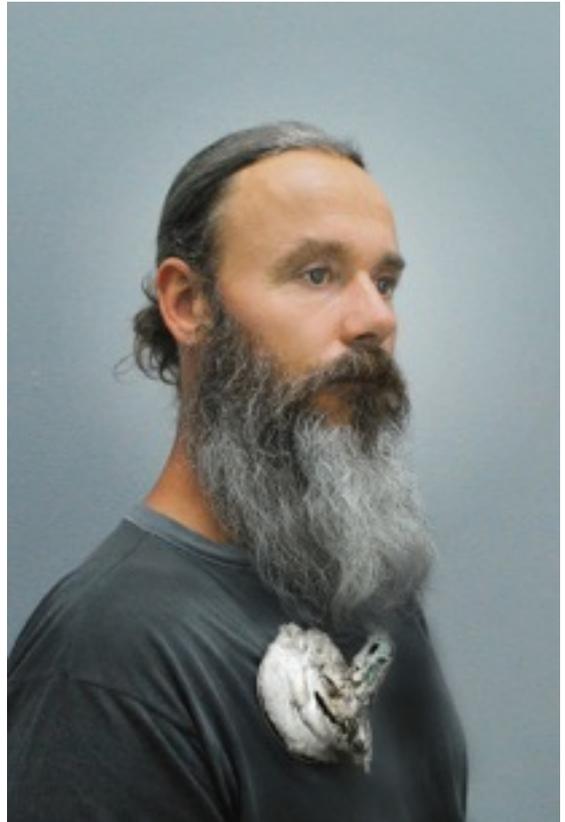
2014

Brooch

Copper, vitreous enamel, silver, sock.

10 x 7 x 9,5 cm

Photo: Carolina Gimeno ©



**Portable Pleasures,**

*When Intimacy becomes Public.*

2014

Brooch

Silver, sock.

9 x 11 x 7 cm

Photo: Carolina Gimeno ©



**Portable Pleasures,**

*When Intimacy becomes Public.*

2014

Brooch

Copper, vitreous enamel, silver, sock.

6 x 7 x 5 cm

Photo: Carolina Gimeno ©<—