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MASTER OF FINE ARTS
RESEARCH PAPER

COUPLE: EXPLORING THE IDEA OF PAIRED OBJECTS IN MY WORK

by

Imogen Perry
Sculpture, Performance and Installation

October 2014
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Abstract:

Studio

The studio work presented for examination deals with coupled objects in phases of need that are described using three key terms: yearn, join and hang. Some or all thirty-three artworks made during this research project will be exhibited at the Sydney College of the Arts Postgraduate Exhibition in December 2014 and if they are not included they will be shown at the Examination. The studio work uses the sensate body to express specific modes of subjectivity, which I have explored by creating objects that capture visceral themes. The objects are phallic symbols, fleshy crevices, gaping holes and torn limbs drawn from the theme of my work. My use of texture and form contains implicit references to sexuality. All the artworks are coupled and when they lie beside each other I aim to create the feeling of yearning and the tension of intimacy resonating in the space that separates them. Some are joined, muscular forms that copulate and others suggest bodies that are post-coital and flagging. Primarily the artworks are made from materials that relate to the body - latex for skin, sisal and plaster for genitalia. This allows me to create objects that reflect the actions and emotions of the body. The objects capture the feeling before, during and after sex. The works crystallise intrinsic desire, as they substitute for the parts of the body that measure and gauge breathlessness, lust, love and abandonment, reinforced and interpreted by my use of form, medium, space, weight and texture.

Research Paper

This research paper explores how my studio practice is informed by my regard for ‘thing’, ‘sex’ and ‘the body’. In this project I assess how I use these words and their meanings to make an idea of a paired object. Representing a paired object in three different motions will be yearn, join and hang, which ultimately stand for desire, pleasure and formlessness. In the introduction, called The Use of Thing, Sex and the Body in Art, I discuss how these principal themes have been utilised and defined in art. This is in order to clarify how these are important to the assessment of my practice. For this section I mainly referred to
the texts *The Object: Documents of Contemporary Art* by Antony Hudek, *The Foucault Reader* by Paul Rabinow and Sally O’Reilly’s *The Body in Contemporary Art*. The remaining thesis discusses how the terms ‘thing’, ‘sex’ and ‘the body’ can be broken into objects of desire, pleasure and formlessness with each of these being divided into *yearn, join* and *hang*. At the beginning of each chapter I explain how *yearn, join* and *hang* are another way of defining objects of desire, pleasure and formlessness. The reason I have chosen to use separate words is because I feel the artwork would be restricted if it were limited to the words of theory alone. By choosing to express and build my work from the feelings of *yearn, join* and *hang* I have been able to expand, bring new insight and renewed life into the theoretical concepts I use.

The three words *yearn, join* and *hang* form my chapters. They serve to bring the following ideas of objects of desire, pleasure and formlessness into distinct focus with the theories of the lack, the lover, primitivism, touching, self-reflection, the uncanny, skin and naturalness. The paper investigates the work of a select group of contemporary artists who employ these themes namely: Julie Rrap, Sarah Lucas, Fiona Hall, Louise Bourgeois, Mikala Dwyer and Andy Goldsworthy. My primary source for the chapter *Yearn* was *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* by David Bate. For the chapter *Join* I examined *The Erotic Object: Sexuality in Sculpture from prehistory to present day* by Susan Quinnell. Lastly for the chapter *Hang* I researched *Formlessness: a user’s guide* by Yves Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss as a key text to draw out important ideas particularly in relation to the materials and forms in my works. Through inquiry into these terms, artists and theorists, the paper will highlight the process of how precise forms and materials can embody and perhaps amplify human sexual feelings and actions.
Prologue:

Couple

A single erotic urge
Crumpling
Binding
Tasting
A convergence of the senses
Copulation
Licking heads
Tearing mouths
Rising into tuneful flesh
Orgasm
Crimson
Falling
Enfolding.

Imogen Perry

I have chosen to explore sculpturally the idea of, ‘a couple, a body of two’. I am aware that when people look at objects they may sometimes interpret them as either female or male. A banana may be a phallic shape or a flower may suggest female genitals. While I do not necessarily dismiss gender as unimportant in my objects, I find however that too often such representations simply repeat stereotypical forms. Instead I am intent on making the word ‘couple’ one bodily presence. In my studio work I translate body parts into objects capable of evoking more abstract ideas about the force of desire and the nature of physical attraction. I want to show fragments of the body in stages of yearn, join or hang. These parts may appear to be reaching or lusting to be together perhaps for pleasure or release. When I think of a pair I go back to an excerpt I read in the novel Weight by Jeanette Winterson about Poseidon and Earth in a partnership of love.

Poseidon loved the strong outlines of Earth’s body. He loved her demarcations and her boundaries. He knew where he stood with her. She was solid, certain,
shaped and material. Earth loved him because he recognized no boundaries. His ambitions were tidal. He swept, he sank, he flooded, and he re-formed. Poseidon was a deluge of a man. Power flowed off him. He was deep, sometimes calm, but never still. Together they teemed with life, they were life. When earth threw a plate across the room, the whole world felt the crash. When Poseidon wooed earth she lapped it up. He was playful, he was warm, he waited for her in the bright blue shallows and came a little closer, then drew back, and his pull was to leave a little gift on the shore. Sometimes he was a long way out and she missed him. Then he was all over her again and would make love on an Island where Poseidon could lie over Earth for a day and a night before subsiding.\(^1\)

While the passage employs some familiar associations, Earth as Mother Earth and female, it also complicates them as Earth is also described as ‘solid’ and ‘certain’ which is a quality usually attributed to men. While it might be interesting to expand on this aspect of the passage, I have chosen to quote it at length in this paper because it explains the intimacies of coupling. It evokes a couple, not human, but with human attributes. Winterson endows the sea and land with the ability to love, live and touch. This is the quality I like to produce in my sculptures - my objects are personifications. As sculptures they contain, emit and embody a three-dimensional projection of primitive feeling: touch, texture, scale, hardness and warmth, evocation and compulsion to move, live and love. The research and premise that supports my studio project is how can I represent the primal instinct of sexual need by translating the words yearn, join and hang into three-dimensional objects? Furthermore what can these objects tell us about human coupling that is perhaps difficult to discover and communicate in words and images? How have other artists and writers engaged with similar themes? Lastly, by delving into the history between art and the prominent themes in my work- the materiality of thing, sex and the body, I hope to establish some of the reasons they emerge in my practice. The introduction begins by inquiring into the use of these terms and provides the background as to how they, as complex ideas, have been utilised and defined in art. I have been inspired by the writings of Martin Heidegger and Ian McEwan on the subject of thing, Michel Foucault on sexuality, and Lucy Lippard on the body.

Introduction: The Use of Thing, Sex and the Body in Art.

In this research paper I aim to investigate how my work explores the stages of need through the physical embodiment of the words *yearn, join* and *hang*. As an artist, I use single words to begin an artwork. The words I choose are not just triggers for ideas and forms. Words also leave a residue of perception that can be analysed. Formation and description of an artwork cannot in part avoid the use of words. Words can also deliver impulses that stem from our deepest sense perceptions. Words assist in my creative and analytical process. I find emotion and meaning stem from a chosen word which helps stimulate a creation that is both random and framed by theory. At first the creative words lead me to the appropriate theory to research. Then both happen simultaneously, almost unconsciously and it becomes one endless loop of going in and out of theory and feeling. For example, last year for Honours, I created a body of work in response to the word ‘hook’. The impetus for this project was when I found a hook in a second hand shop and the project became to re-find the hook in tactile terms and through a philosophical, poetic and theoretical inquiry of weight and desire. Psychoanalyst, Jean Laplanche believed that archetypal forms like weight and desire, which exist in the unconscious, are linked to primal scenes and the original fantasies of one’s enigma.

In my studio work I draw on unconscious desire to generate sculptural forms that are somehow familiar but which also retain intrigue and mystify by remaining raw and ambiguous. Keeping some of the meaning partially hidden, without endlessly defining, refining premises and defending conclusions may allow an audience to participate, uninhibitedly, developing their own thoughts to their fullest extent. For this two-year project I have selected a theme that resonates with me but which for others may have differing interpretations- the word ‘couple’. Choosing to explore paired objects in my work I can analyse and insightfully understand and articulate, through researching within the art fields of thing, sex, and the body. I researched and found aspects of thing, sex, and the body in art.

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3 Ibid, 14.
Art historian and critic Jean-Francois Chevrier said that, ‘every object is a thing, but not every thing is an object’. This suggests that the things we call ‘objects’ form a distinct but smaller group amongst a larger category of ‘things’. Objects like sculpture have qualities that are different to the material, perceptible and consumable goods commonly referred to as objects. According to Chevrier these are, in fact, only things. In other words an object is not only a thing but has a much broader and more specific position. What is it that allows for a thing to be converted into an object?

The foremost theory explaining how a thing becomes an object began with the teachings and writings of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger asks what is a thing and defines it into three meanings, the third one being the answer to the question:

1. a thing that is present at hand.
2. a thing in which it means whatever.
3. anything that is a ‘something’ or has ‘thingness’ and is not nothing.

This ‘something’ I believe art tries to have. Heidegger believes ‘thingness’ is when a thing succeeds in being immediate in the things that surround us. ‘‘Something’ is achieved when an object resists generalization, unassertiveness, and representation from science, modernity and novelty’. Conveying ‘thingness’ is an object that is unconditioned. This helps us to see further and beyond the comprehensible when there are elements that do not provide a basis for our beliefs. Every decision has the presumption that we will find the knowledge to answer our questions and it is because of this that society loves to ask, ‘What is a thing? What does it look like? And where is a thing with thingness?’ Art drags these questions from the viewer and, as Heidegger suggests, this may be the key to our continued enjoyment of it. Art, like things, has the capacity to take us outside the natural world-view in order to question it.

When nothings change into things and display different interpretations then

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7 Ibid, 9.
society starts to question their authenticity, normality and self-evidence. Art changes our questioning and evaluations towards things- of our seeing, deciding and in short, of being in the midst of ‘what is?’ We learn from art to see more clearly what holds us captive and makes us free or unfree in our experience. Jacques Lacan takes a similar stand by asserting that a thing also resists and stands out of language and consciousness. He says that a ‘thing is our true secret’. The study of objects through the prism of art and through the world of artists begins to reveal how complex the world of ordinary and less ordinary objects and things truly are. An object can appear as any medium that may be seen or touched but I am driven to understand why an art object is made and what is its significance. What are objects or things to people and why do we collect, or are drawn to them? Objects like sculpture stand apart from the general category of things. They are not used but responded to and to collect is to amass objects without function. Without ‘the artist’, society would no longer invest in crafting aimless things, nor would we manufacture or mass-produce them. However it is clear that people like and desire these things. In the book In between the Sheets by Ian McEwan he explains the drive to collect an object is on account of the pleasure found by amassing and setting them out. In this way what gives an individual pleasure can be repeatedly viewed in private or displayed to others and ‘elucidates an action that amounts to self-love’. The act of collecting stands for the self-love that is desired by us all. Objects that can illustrate the skill, value and ability of humans help us learn about ourselves. They also serve to remind us that if self-love was not possible a person could not accept or return affection to another person. As the quote at the beginning of Chapter One suggests, an object can, satisfy (if only briefly) our desire to draw nearer to comprehending the core of our being. A thing or object like art can reveal and educate us about our surroundings and ourselves. Things are made when the question is posed, ‘What is and how?’ while never providing a clear answer.

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8 Ibid, 51.
Another ‘something’ that surrounds us is sex. Sex, like thing, can never be fully explained. They both amount to emotions and actions that cannot be described by words. They both have formlessness where they are open and yet not fully understood. Sex can be a political, violent, pleasurable, mysterious, humorous and even shocking or reprehensible topic. However, regardless of our personal feelings about it, sex is something we cannot ignore. The suggestion of sex can be found anywhere from garden hoses to trains entering tunnels, and this is because sex grabs our attention and speaks to us in a language we all understand. There is an endless supply of artists trying to communicate what are complex but often unspoken ideas surrounding the topic. They try to reinvent it into something new, dress it up or down or approach sex in different ways. An artwork about sex can help define sexual discourse by enhancing freedom and open-mindedness while relinquishing antiquated beliefs and taboos. Art can communicate the contemporary attitudes, styles and mentalities that sex has taken. If sex is everywhere then looking at art that challenges its definition may help us as a society come to terms with unspoken desires and continuing taboos. My research draws on the theoretical approaches to sexuality of the philosopher, Michel Foucault. Foucault’s writings on sexuality attempt to demystify key aspects and ideas in contemporary society: social construction, power, the unconscious and perversity. According to Foucault, sexuality is distinguished by the perceptions of self and society’s principles, shaped by the boundaries of judgement and control that determine what society considers to be an ‘ethical person’. In his first volume on The History of Sexuality is an essay called, ‘We Other Victorians’, Foucault looks at how the Victorian era, with its inhibited and prudish attitudes to sex epitomised the change from the more sexually relaxed mores of the past. In the Victorian period sexuality was confined to the home. The discourse surrounding sex became focused on family life and the serious

function of reproduction. All other elements of sexuality were silenced.\textsuperscript{12} They were made to disappear or were driven out, denied and reduced. All acceptances of other desires within sexuality were only to be found in places like brothels and mental hospitals.

Today, society, as in Foucault’s time, is still trying to understand sexuality and this can produce moral anxiety and confusion. The evidence of this occurring is because of the various interpretations and forms sexuality has. Sexual satisfaction is met with individual needs and desires and too often exists secretly. Our experience of sexuality is very diverse. Hence today’s society, like the Victorians, is still trying to define sexuality and a continuing puritanical sensibility about sexuality exists.

A more contemporary writer on gender and sexuality, Judith Butler in her book, \textit{Gender Trouble}, concludes like Foucault, that identity and sexuality are the same, acknowledging that the assumptions we form about our sexuality and those made on our behalf by society affect and inform the entire discourse on gender identity. Society (popular culture) makes visible conventional standards for various roles and social functions. Our identities are forever trying to fit within these guidelines because this social context is said to define our personhood. To conform to this is deemed acceptable and intelligent. These guidelines such as, consciousness, the capacity for language or moral deliberation, are governed by a sexuality that has to be approved by society’s norms, otherwise we view ourselves as aberrant. This underlying moral tenet creates Foucault’s theory of repression. The culture we live in is determined to bully us into accepting their narrow definition of sexuality and repress our individual right to forge our own sexual instinct and desire. Pornography and advertising exploit the repression of sexuality that society manufactures. In the suburbs there are silences of desire that remain marginalized. For example in a recent Australian television show called \textit{Offspring}, a husband was videoing his wife and his new born in front of their friends in the hospital, when his wife censoriously said ‘No nipples in the shot’.

Foucault’s solution to freeing ourselves sexually comes at a price. ‘Nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech,

a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required’. It is this freedom that I aspire to have in my sculpture. In my work there is a shift from sexual sublimation to reawaken the senses and allow a reverie that could become either fulfilling, repellent or both. The work doesn’t try to answer questions or theorise about sexuality but stimulates the viewer’s innate desires allowing them space to think freely. Foucault believed that Sigmund Freud’s theory of ‘Repressive Hypothesis’ - the one main implication of our sexuality and our resulting psychology, was misguided and narrow because humans were more complex. Sexuality is not wholly definable but when trying to understand it we should consider our individual and social perspective. Subsequently it delivers no judgment. Like the philosopher, Jacques Lacan advised, ‘our sexual identities as male and female, our confidence in language as true or false and our security in the image we judge as perfect or flawed, are fantasies’. My artwork uses the unconscious to force out mental repression and to create conflict between the ideas, wishes and desires of our sexuality. Freud says, ‘no healthy person, it appears, can fail to make some addition that might be called perverse to the normal sexual aim; and the universality of this finding is in itself enough to show how inappropriate it is to use the word perversion as a term of reproach’.

Sexuality has the capacity to build invasive discourses that shape, constrict and distort human impulses and the sense of self. On the other hand, with a certain amount of power, situation and knowledge, citizens could be able to live relatively satisfying lives according to an ethos based on rational self-mastery and the pursuit of pleasure without ill health. Society on sexuality should not eliminate and bury the truth about sexuality but rather accept that there are many ways to please the body and the self, and when this occurs, culture may just be able to deal with the more perilous ones at hand. My artwork raises questions about the biases and permissiveness of sexuality and by doing so aims to help broaden more narrow-minded views. In the work I contrast visual metaphors for repression and offer images of gushing energy, one that has been held in check.

13 Ibid, 294.
A way of describing the emotions felt in sex without words is through the use of the body. The body is now a potent signifier of lived experience as well as a medium of formal and aesthetic inquiry. It has become recognised as the principal arena for the politics of identity, as well as a facilitator and marker of belonging. Twenty-first century body art rapidly evolved from movements that utilised the body such as nineteenth century Romanticism and Realism. Romanticism pictured beauty in the naked body as young, curvaceous and hyper real. The body would even be set in pictorial scenes of myths, religion and nature to enhance the idealisation. Realism represented the body in mundane life without any embellishments or illusion.

In the twentieth century Body Art underwent a major shift by investigating the body’s inorganic aspects. It inspired the movement, Dadaism (anti-art), which defined the body with no rules, except that it couldn’t be anything like their predecessors’ theories. It amalgamated a range of mediums for the body - dance, theatre, poetry, design and literature and this fusion came to be accepted into the visual arts realm. In the nineteen-fifties artists like Jackson Pollock and the Gutai group in Japan began processing their work in an entirely different way. They involved their bodies viscerally to invent the work that led the Body Art to Happenings in the nineteen-sixties. Happenings were performances, events or situations that were usually improvised. Explosively in the nineteen-seventies, the body was embraced and politicised in feminist art. Feminist art questioned for the first time gender imbalance and the misrepresentation of women, their roles and their bodies in society.

Body Art focuses on creating, viewing and interpreting art in relation to the body. Body Art reflects humanity in all of its vast complexities; it can be beautiful, repulsive, abject or heartening to the viewer. It generates an involuntary tension of intimacy with the beholder. It does not have to include a literal body; it can be abstract and still articulate itself using the body as its concept or medium.

How and to what purpose, do contemporary artists like myself choose to engage with the body? Many contemporary artists use the body as their subject or tool because society and the artist relate intrinsically to the work. To view and

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interpret artwork about the body reawakens our senses. Artists choose to manipulate our perception of it to lessen the gap between art and life by exploring it as a construction of forms with various means of discourse, obligations and instruments of control.\(^{18}\) Artists know society will never lose interest in this medium because it is personal whether it involves you, someone you know or something you have heard someone being capable of. It can identify the limitations of the body, how society chooses to act with it and the outgoing effects from these actions. Body Art considers how society subjectifies the body to ramifications and the different sorts of impacts society projects or indents onto or into it. Work that is generated about the body can express how society can alter and modify the body with extremity. It centres on humanity and can therefore illustrate the range of situations our bodies endure. Body Art can be about the viewer and artist registering a relation to the body, self-presentation or the social meaning of what surrounds it. It can help redefine the public’s representation of the body and challenge assumptions. Body Art can also bring the decisions of what is done to our bodies under intense public scrutiny.

Contemporary artists whose work (theoretical and practical) can be read as Body Art can provide an education, self-awareness and redefine culture to both men and women concerning the body. Lucy Lippard, the feminist art critic said, we take for granted that making art is not simply ‘expressing oneself’ but is a far broader and more important task - expressing oneself as a member of a larger unity, so that in speaking for oneself one is also speaking for those who cannot speak.\(^{19}\) Lippard states that feminist artwork has found a successful political route through body art to channel women’s concerns directly and they are often confronting to the general public. Through the smallest of bodily gestures whether it is a fist, a back or lips, each bodywork delicately enriches the majesty of form and meaning to the viewer. This has led me to analyse my work using the theories I have identified.

Each chapter explores a particular stage of sexual need, yet these distinct stages have blurred lines, and central fragments will reappear in other chapters.


Thus some of the meanings and analysis of *yearn, join and hang* will find their place in and across the chapters. In this research paper I am seeking to articulate the theoretical, sociological and phenomenological aspects of my work. I am setting aside a psychoanalytical approach as much as is possible so that the work keeps a concealed meaning and retains a trace of the enigmatic: to mystify an audience, regardless of how it is has been produced.  

It is in chapter *Yearn*, that I investigate a couple yearning as an object of desire. I set out to explain through visual analysis what a couple in desire is, how it is found and repeated through theories of an object of desire. The theories used are from the seventeenth-century author Mario Praz, academic Roger Cardinal, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and the founder of Surrealism, Andre Breton. It is through the lure of symbols like a Rebus- a model of writing irreducible to speech, that the objects of desire I create can inquire into the need that forms the tension between two lovers without having to over describe. This will allow the works to resonate.

In the second chapter *Join* I explore the idea that pleasure can be found when a couple has joined. I reason this through the writers Adam Geczy and Steven Connor, art historian Alois Riegl, Freud, philosopher Immanuel Kant and Breton. I examine artworks that display the pleasure in sex. For example, a rock might be the displaced sign for association for a part of the body like a testicle. It is these mechanisms, condensation and displacements which account for the strangeness that produces quality and pleasurable objects.  

Finally the chapter *Hang* considers the satiated body at rest and discusses the objects I have made that have the tactile quality of skin that is loose and sagging which symbolizes the after effect of joining. It is theorised in terms of formlessness by Rosalind Krauss and Yves Alain Bois.

In each of the three chapters on my studio research I also analyse how my artwork, like a latent thought, forces its way into consciousness and manifests into form. This process starts with a gesture, an action of speech, writing, a word- all signs that can be distorted, mutated, replaced, confused, forgotten, activated or obliterated throughout the making of the final work. I would like to

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21 Ibid, 70.
produce fantastically and metaphorically, imagined objects that have dialogues between non-sense, poetry, primitiveness, emotion and surrealism. To present a successful thing to an audience that does not hesitate to invoke and enable unconscious ideational representatives, is my aim.
Chapter One: Yearn

Desire is the inner core of our being.\textsuperscript{22}

The focus of this chapter explores the innate sensation to yearn. More specifically it explores the space of tension that is made between two people who long to connect - a couple who wish to converge. Of course it is not always easy to understand the motivation behind our feelings of pleasure and displeasure, which sometimes seem insistent but also arbitrary. They stem from the most obscure and inaccessible region of the mind therefore only a partial hypothesis can be offered.\textsuperscript{23}

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, developed a theory of desire in nineteen-twenty. He described it as an unbound form of energy, a quantity of excitation in the mind before binding - a pleasure in the final elimination of discharge. Stimulation of the erotogenic zones lead to an increase in tension which in its turn is responsible for producing the necessary motor energy for the conclusion of the sexual act.\textsuperscript{24} Freud said that one way desire is identified or articulated is through and by objects. Objects may be created due to a lack of fulfilment or they may lead to craving for stimulation resulting from the pursuit of desire. Objects may come from the inner core of ourselves. It is these ideas which are the inspiration for my investigation of objects signified by the words engulfment and desire.

I shall discuss my studio work, Avid, Burrow and Prone along with two contemporary artworks by Julie Rrap and Sarah Lucas. These are linked by the three words I have selected to structure this paper as well as being a framework for analysing the ‘couple’. Each of the works are paired objects that represent one couple in a state of yearning. They reflect on and express to the viewer our natural inclination to desire. I want to reduce art to the simplest expression. I believe we find lovers the same way we are drawn to certain objects. We take lovers to combat apprehension, find reassurance, share reflection and seek pleasure following elemental desires. For this reason I sculpt objects as couples

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 26.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 26.
and I have chosen to explore, inquire and research into the theoretical link between objects and desires; this is sometimes referred to as ‘objects of desire’, which is the term I will use. There is little consensus among philosophers, writers or psychoanalysts about how objects of desire can be conceptualized and how to sort them. In this chapter I focus on the lack of desire, the lover and the primitive as reasons to objectify desire as theorised by Sigmund Freud, Mario Praz, Roger Cardinal, Jacques Lacan and Andre Breton.

Freud postulates that the restriction on sexual activity that society imposes on an individual, leads to the repression of sexual needs, and dissatisfaction with love is formed. This imbalance results in one partner in the sexual act not accepting the original object of desire but taking surrogates through infantile attachments to part-objects such as breasts and excrements. Freud says that, ‘the finding of an object is in fact a re-finding of it’ and that an object found in childhood can allow us to discover or touch on our sexual instincts. I do not agree that we renounce the sexual objects of our childhood in order to grow up, as Freud suggests, but that we find a new way of looking at or discovering them. This re-finding is when we encounter an object again and become aware of the emotions generated by memory. In this second encounter the object is different; its meaning can be enhanced or altered.

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 1.** Imogen Perry. *Avid*, 2013. Soapstone, size variable.

My work *Avid* [fig.1] comprises two soapstone forms drawing closer. The one in front is long and outstretching, advancing towards a rut like an anus or

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vulva, on the larger stone. This couple is yet to acknowledge and understand its desire. The object of desire can be described as a couple in a state of ambivalence. Avid comes from a series of objects that transpired from this memory. A group of children at a party put a rock, shaped exactly like a stool, on my seat and told the adults I had soiled my pants. Freud would contend that this primitive impulse was a wish for the original object of desire (the poo) but that only repression would be found. This may be the reason I keep frequently representing an endless series of substitute objects (like Avid) none of which brings full satisfaction. Followers of Freud, including the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, variously developed this model. Desire, in Lacan’s terms, was always the desire of, and for, the other. It involved desire for recognition by the other, desire to be directed to something new, (it is impossible to desire what one already has) and demanded that the subject desired only what was already designated as desirable by the other. For Lacan, desire was an inescapable element in the maturation of an infant which was essential for the infant’s entry into the world of language.

I agree with Lacan, that my encounter with the faecal stone has been redirected and shaped into the genitals of a man. The stone is no longer associated with bodily waste. I disagree with Freud who asserts the importance of repression in the representation of desire instead of impulse. If I acknowledge the impulse, as part of the outcome, the work cannot be the product of repression. It is only from open engagement with the primitive impulse that I can create from a remembered object an object of desire. The stone is now enriched with desire. My approach to desire is influenced by Andre Breton, the director of the movement Surrealism, who believed that an object of desire emerges from a symbol that can produce an exhilarating dream-image, which embeds itself on the mind of the observer as a poetic image. Objects of desire materialize from our psyche as a compulsion to search for an understanding of our sexuality.

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27 Ibid, 36.

I like this because as my mother is a published Australian poet she brought me up to poeticize as a way of interpreting life. Creating an object of desire allows me to re-find the signs of my experience and understanding of the world. It allows the work to be outspoken and uncompromising. It does not seek approval or disapproval. Objects of desire grasp a freedom like poetry and dreams that often seem out of reach in our world of conformity and containment. I do believe objects can contest and rearticulate what should be included within a rational comprehension, of the world. Civilization corrupts man’s natural happiness and it is art that sets me free.
The Surrealists’ exploration of desire was influenced by Freud but they rejected the notion of a cure and the standards of normality implicit in psychoanalysis. They preferred the vision of desire as an active ever-creative force rather than a concept of desire founded on the notion of lack. Desire was a central theme to the Surrealists. To them, human beings were seen as agents for desires and were perennially in search of an object, which combine reality, unconscious wishes and desires. These in turn embodied arousal and the renewal of desire. Objects can contain searching and finding, veiling and revealing, presence and absence, thresholds and passages with no clear boundaries or fixed identities. Often a body of a loved one would be an object of desire, as lovers could create an ‘atmosphere’ and ‘feeling’ and convert everything ordinary into an explosive experience of action. Breton takes this from Freud’s concept of finding an object of desire in two methods. Firstly by seeking an object based on someone or something that will care or look after them as their parent/s did or secondly a type of object of choice sought for the subject’s own ego and found again in other people. In both cases the object speaks of a partner and it is this link in which I am interested.

Figure 2. Julie Rrap. Body Double, 2007. Digital video projection, silicon rubber sculpture, electronic components, size variable.

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31 I am mindful that Freud was studying his patients to find the primary sources to uncover the reasons for desiring these objects as a way to help them but for me it is not important to analyse myself or explain it to an audience why I have made this artwork but simply to heighten the effects of desire in an object, as Freud proves this to be close to our inner core.
Body Double [fig. 2] by Australian artist Julie Rrap, exhibits the first model of an object of desire. Body Double is composed of two silicon rubber casts, of the artist’s own body, like corpses on an undertaker’s table - cold and pale. A projection of figures with the sounds of breathing pass over the casts one at a time animating the once lifeless casts into living and pulsing bodies. This action is representing how the love from someone can make you feel. Identities are blurred as the projected forms seamlessly transform from female to male. One cast is facing up and the other down with no beginning or end, a circulation of life and love. At one point a male body screens over the artist as if she is covered in yearning and then a pregnant woman appears projected onto her as if she is being born. Rrap uses her forms to understand who she really is, remembering the people she has met and the experiences that remain for her.

Figure 3. Imogen Perry. Burrow, 2011. Latex, rocks, belts, sand, dirt, wire, patina, rust, size variable.

My work Burrow [fig. 3] is an example of the second model of desire (finding a lover like yourself). It is an expression of sexual instinct laying bare my diverse and individual needs as found in the body of my lover. The artwork incorporates simple wants, powerful yearning and darker aspects of sexuality where madness, emptiness and repetition seep through. It is a pursuit of love. Lacan said of this pursuit, that it creates an object of desire, a creative spark or disturbing image of physical conflict, when it repeats, potentially manifesting itself over and over. However this suggestion of an original lack at the heart of desire is seen by Freud as an element in the compulsion to repeat behaviour.

within the psyche. He also defines it as the source for fetishistic attachments and desire for a range of substitutes for a sexual partner, and offers a compelling conceptual model for the operation of desire.\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Burrow} is a work where I feel I am running into myself. It represents one half of a couple yearning for the other. I used the word ‘burrow’ from my reading of \textit{Owls Do Cry} by Janet Frame. On a picnic in a beautiful, rugged and abandoned landscape, the main character, afraid of the freedom and open space, escapes by retreating inside herself described by Frame as ‘burrow’. I wanted to represent an object that was both unhindered and controlled. It is an object that represents that feeling of wanting to escape and avoid things but also the realization that being inside a safe surrounding can lead to boredom, ignorance and isolation. I wanted to show how I often feel like withdrawing from the world, seeking sanctuary in a place which gives me comfort and seclusion. When I read \textit{Unspeakable} by Sharon Olds I felt that this snippet of the poem explained this also.

\begin{quote}
When he loved me, I looked
out at the world as if from inside
a profound dwelling, like a burrow…\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

I made \textit{Burrow} in 2011 after I had been separated from my partner for a year. \textit{Burrow} consists of two opposing objects - the burrow that I am in when I am with him and apart from him. Breton described this paradox of beauty as ‘convulsive’.\textsuperscript{36} It is this elated and unbound feeling that enables it to become desirable. The sensation is a feeling of emptiness like a barren landscape or a woman unable to have children. It is a place to wander into, like Alice, when she is lost and seeking. This object yearns and is left aimless. While \textit{Burrow} instantiates a person’s yearning for safety and understanding from a love that is like their own, the next example is of a yearning that is generated from being led by their intrinsic senses.

The fixity of the emblematic picture was infinitely suggestive; the beholder little by little let his imagination be eaten into as a plate is by acid. The picture eventually became animated with an intense, hallucinatory life, independent of the page. The eyes were not alone in perceiving it, the depicted objects were invested with body, scent and sound; the beholder was no longer impressed only but obsessed.\footnote{Mario Praz, \textit{Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery, Vol. I.} (London: Warburg, 1939/1963), 170.}

This quote on imagery is the earliest example of the desiring of objects and dates back to the seventeenth-century. The quote suggests that humans have a primal instinct to use their sensory faculties to gain awareness of themselves by conceiving desires and turning them into images. These impulses of erotic images are in fact bodily objects that ‘impress’ and ‘obsess’ us. It explains how primitive it is to make and desire a sensual object.

\textbf{Figure 4.} Imogen Perry. \textit{Prone}, 2013. Plaster, patina, size variable.

This description of an object of desire reflects my research into the work \textit{Prone} [fig. 4]. \textit{Prone} consists of four objects of plaster that lie flat and latent beside each other. Their vulnerable and confused bodies undulate, like earthworms brought to the surface, waiting for something. As the feelers at the ends of their bodies rise, their once dormant bodies linger, held by their weight while reaching towards other objects and this dichotomy creates tension. This work depicts how the body rises, falls alone and yet is drawn towards another person by a physical and emotional impulse. The sculptures are of couples caught in the early moments of sexual love, trying to lift their weight out of their own comfortable sphere, and not always managing. It takes note that unlike many other desires, sexual desire is rarely satisfied. This is similar to psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan’s theory on sublimation. Lacan depicts the virtue of devotion as a sickly unobtainable aim/object, which by sublimation brings
only suffering. The figures in Prone appear to live by the conventions of courtly love and fail. This piece depicts the precautions and ruses of desire’s consciousness and suggests that the senses influence and direct one to act on our inner most yearnings.

The French physician Julien La Mettrie said there is no purpose in life beyond the pleasure of the senses. Prone is erotic, a theatre of provocations and prohibitions in which life’s most profound urges confront one another. The sculpture renews contact with the simple but utterly crucial experiences such as touch, sight and smell. They are enticingly warm and nourishing yet at the same time threatening and violent. This sensation typifies a reaction to any object of desire by allowing the viewer to encounter an object that is unexpectedly captivating and tactile. Spectators can approach these sculptures eroticly, as if they were fetish objects to be gently stroked. The work feels like a detail from a cave painting, the lines of black running through the patina and the soft imbued shapes forming on the surface. This resembles flesh with embedded veins and a pigmented exterior. This couple are looking, searching, comparing, lusting, reflecting, blushing, imagining and naked beside each other.

Figure 5. Sarah Lucas. Man Marrow, 2004. Concrete, size variable.

Lastly, is a work by Sarah Lucas called Man Marrow [fig. 5]. The title Man Marrow is playful and suggestive, with a shape that is figural and erotic- a vegetable cast in cement that has an uncanny resemblance to a man’s penis. The name suggests something fleshy but because the texture is left grey, rough and grainy, this allows the hardness to seem tender and lively. The surfaces,
materials and forms of Man Marrow are unrefined, sensual and untamed. It responds to Outsider Art, which could be the nearest representative of the quote as they are artworks of raw erotica - rare and primitive. In a chapter on Outsider Art called Depicting the object of desire, academic Roger Cardinal explains that an object of desire can be an illustration that creates sexual excitement while also being illusive. He theorises that this compels the viewer to peer more closely and find suffusions of beguiling symbols and substitutes and that this will induce the rare, pleasure of being seduced by mystification. An object of desire, like Man Marrow demands attention from the viewer because the viewer is unable to decide what is actually being communicated. It is in the viewer’s efforts to construe the meaning of the work that provides them with an addictive source of libidinal energy.

Sarah Lucas’ erotic, mysterious object, which is like a natural form, a pitted surface like that of a pumus stone or a find from an archaeological dig epitomises her long standing interest in the erotic, especially in terms of its relation to the human body and its parts. She subverts their literal nature, to create ambiguous and metaphorical shapes. The most startling thing about Lucas’ forms is that while they are seductive and unreal, they simultaneously, like all sculpture, invite the viewer to touch and be repelled. An object that resembles reality allows us, in our uncertainty, to draw upon complex emotions and experiences within ourselves. Breton describes this as, problematic and intriguing. Man Marrow represents the multiplicities of desire, often refashioning the ‘object’ body in order to evoke the subject’s touch, gaze and erotic obsession.

This chapter portrays couples who are in yearning and are about to join. What they reveal is the impression of the senses that are renewed and driven from an indwelling emotion of desire. They are couples evaluating the levels of satisfaction and the discontentment of pleasure. They reflect our endless search

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43 Ibid, 97.
to find ourselves through objects or people that draw us ever closer to arousal. *Avid, Body Double, Burrow, Prone, Man Marrow* are all objects that illustrate the influences that desire and yearning for desire exerts upon our lives.
Chapter Two: Join

Humans desire to be touched.\textsuperscript{46}

The desire to be touched affectionately is inherent in all human beings and I am exploring joining through the medium of sex. This chapter centres on the word Join. Join is interpreted as two objects which touch and then remain for a time in contact with each other such as a couple in coitus. It will be examined through an exploration of three main topics - pleasure, touching and self-reflection exemplified by my works Two, With and Elided. They will be contextualised with two contemporary artworks, \textit{Pardisus Terestris} by Fiona Hall and \textit{Clutching} by Louise Bourgeois.

There is pleasure in surrendering to the needs of bodily desire and permitting our inner body to feel at harmony with the outer world. Pleasure is the nearest state we have to actualizing our will, which is what defines and sustains all our actions. In his book, \textit{Art: Histories, Theories and Exceptions}, Adam Geczy explains that pleasure from a work of art is not the same as pleasure in a good wine or a pretty frock. It is more complex and uncertain and because of this it can pose tantalizing questions about how pleasure might be achieved and maintained.\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure6.png}
\caption{Imogen Perry. \textit{Two}, 2010. Latex, paint, paper, wire, belts, size variable.}
\end{figure}

What drives people to art is pleasure taken in being challenged, pleasure in being stimulated, and in the extreme, pleasure from how the work of art also satisfies the instinct for displeasure. A work can first appear to be ugly, until it

\textsuperscript{47} Adam Geczy, \textit{Art: Histories, Theories and Exceptions}. (UK: Berg, 2008), 116.
works upon the sensibilities and the understanding, which finally accept it as beautiful. Delineating this, is my work Two [fig. 6]- two forms covered in cockled paper creating a patterned exterior like an echidna. They have moulded belts on the ends where they are facing each other, one that is protruding and one that is concaving. The shapes spines are bowed outwards with the view of them slightly collapsing. This aspect reveals both shapes entirely relaxing and lying with each other. The forms have been deliberately joined or bound by the liquid between them. The light between the two bodies is organically slithery or like an umbilical cord. It is a picture of sex as messy and wet, two bodies that are contorted and in the throes of love. When two ultimately join, after yearning for each other, there are pleasure and disappointment to be had in achieving union.

In Two, pleasure lies in the paradox of sex as attractive and unattractive at the same time. Two is contemplating the brain in relation to sex and reminds us that sex is not entirely of the body, that it lies rather, on the threshold between mind and body. The first aim is to alienate the viewer by a strange and unusual composition, for it to become familiar through the human action that is sex. Like Freud who often saw a penis in every convex form and a vagina in every concave one, I hope the viewer will see the symbolisation of the body in this piece. The work is placed on the floor so as to draw the viewer’s gaze downwards to accept one view of the actions and appearance of sex- sex as unattractive and unsatisfying and yet also satisfying and ultimately pleasurable through its quality to repulse and intrigue. According to the philosopher Immanuel Kant, the base and unattractive nature of an object can fascinate and compel an audience as it makes judgments of taste on the degree to which the object brings pleasure or aversion.

In *Paradisus Terestris* [fig. 7] (Paradise on Earth) by Australian artist, Fiona Hall, Hall stages the primal scene inside a sardine tin which has been refashioned to represent the genitals of a male and female joining in sex. On top of the tin is an intricately cut out design of a tree also made of aluminium. Together with her growing interest in the human body and sexuality, Hall uses the story of *The Garden of Eden* as a vehicle for these investigations.\(^{51}\) The artist is deliberately joining the body and nature to reveal the pleasures and the benefits of having sex which she links with symbols of fertility, growth and naturalness. Even in the choice of material she is radiating and reflecting this message to its audience. Australian art historian, Alois Riegl says that visual art is thus a cultural phenomenon like any other, and ultimately its evolution depends upon the same factor that governs all human cultural evolution: the world-view as an expression of the human need for happiness.\(^{52}\) Hall is enriching and enshrining the need for and action of sex in happiness and pleasure.

Art that conveyed pleasure was first spoken about in the *Nichomachean Ethics*. It states that all men seek pleasure because all desire life. Life is a form of pleasurable activity. When a man engages in an event in connection with objects and by means of those faculties he likes best, the pleasure that is found in these undertakings perfects them and so perfects life, which all men desire to

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have. It is understandable then that we seek pleasure, for it perfects life for each of us and life is a desirable thing.\textsuperscript{53} I think when the body is an object of pleasure in the action of sex, this joining is the key to unlatching this emotion of elation in life.

The importance of touch in human affairs can be reflected in our language; notice how the word is used in common figures of speech dealing with communication. We ask our friends and family to ‘keep in touch’, and when someone or something stirs our emotions, we exclaim, ‘How touching!’ or sympathetically state, ‘I am touched’.\textsuperscript{54} Through touch, humans reinforce bonds between individuals. Friends greet one another with reassuring facial expressions and touches. Touch is reassuring because it communicates a lack of hostility and an impression of fondness. This is why a caring touch is a useful, if not essential, prelude to sex in many primates, especially in humans.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{Figure 8.} Imogen Perry. \textit{With}, 2013. Limestone, approx L20 x W15 x H8cm.

My work \textit{With} [fig. 8] portrays a couple, two men who are touching. The touching in this work is referring to the most sensitive parts of the body-the lips, fingers and external genitalia illustrating the physical intimacy that leads to sexual intercourse. Sex can encapsulate an intimate amount of touching and attention. The couple is joined signalling intimate acts of holding, fondling, nuzzling, licking, kissing, grooming, caressing, patting and rubbing. The limestone paints an atmosphere that touch is nurturing, soothing with a warm feeling. \textit{With} lays bare the rewards of joining. Touch can prevent conflict and if

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 117.
\textsuperscript{54} Nina Jablonski, \textit{Skin: A Natural History}. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 97.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 103.
there has been conflict restore the social bonds between a couple. Much of the pleasure of sexual intimacy comes from the exquisite expectation of touch and the delight and relief of skin-to-skin contact with another person before, during and after the sex act itself.⁵⁶

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 9.** Louise Bourgeois. *Clutching*, 1962. Bronze, silver nitrate patina 12 x 13 x 12 inches.

*Clutching* [fig. 9] by Louise Bourgeois is a bronze sculpture with several coils like parts of the body that are limbs or penises embracing each other. The form expresses eroticism and pleasure by the use of touching. It is a study of the body in gestures that feature bulbous volumes echoing bottoms, heads, hands, breasts, clitorises, vulvas, knees, tongues, all the parts of the eroticized body. Bourgeois uses analogies with body parts creating an erotic effect in her work entering unconsciously into the viewer’s mind. This in turn produces an organic liaison by way of perturbation between exhibitor and spectator. Her sculptures maintain a distance from their anatomical referent. Their morphological fluidity enables multiple allusions to occur, reinforcing or contradicting female or male identifications. About this Bourgeois says, ‘sometimes I am totally concerned with female shapes-clusters of breasts like clouds-but often I merge the imagery-phallie breasts, male and female, active and passive’.⁵⁷ The explicit sexual arousal of the bodies and their wanton surrender to one another creates a ravishing carnal pleasure.

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⁵⁶ Ibid, 119.
This erotic touching draws on the principle of pleasure found in Freud’s essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Freud propounds that the Pleasure Principle leads our adult psyche to seek and re-seek unconscious and instinctual drives to ultimately gain pleasure. Even though there is a delay at first, which is felt as a temporary pain where we hold onto reality, the psyche will eventually return to the postponed satisfaction. This feeling of diminished gratification, Freud says, is the characteristic of the operation of the sex impulses. Whether they are acted on or not, this will happen over and over again. 58 Hence according to Freud, Bourgeois is trying to recapture the experience of anticipation. The desire to repeat the act is in order to access displeasure and simultaneously gratify the urge. The Pleasure Principle theoretically affirms that the work has its origins in the driving pressure of a compulsion. This explains the need for repetition. Searching for pleasure and its impulses within ourselves is a self-reflecting response and undertaking.

In between the tenth and thirteenth centuries in India tales of erotica were elaborately carved onto the temples that belonged to the Chandela Dynasty. One reading of a carving is said to describe a son who was visited by his dead mother who charged him with building shrines devoted to the human passions, with the intention of revealing the vanity and transience of human desire. 59 This story shines light on one aim for pleasure that is indulgent and narcissistic. Our ego, Freud said, is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body, besides representing the superfcies of the mental apparatus. 60 A form of self-reflection by Freud is called the *ego ideal*. It is the inner image of oneself as one wants to become. 61 This pursuit to be ideal is unachievable yet it is continuously sought after. Another vent for pleasure and displeasure is searching for it in ourselves.

This is made visible in one of my pieces called *Elided* [fig. 10]. *Elided* displays pleasure in the exterior of the body, as a fragmentation. Fragmentation of the body implies fragmentation of the psyche. In this piece there are four sculptures of plaster, parading the shim lines to divide the form into two halves to portray the split self. They are their own pair. They are self-reflecting, limned with the complexities and erring of a person’s psyche. Breton described the two halves of the split self as -the haunting other in the self and about learning the mere fraction of what I have forgotten.62 They should appear to be asking ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Who am I haunting?’ 63 This splitting of the subject demands the spectators to retreat into their own thoughts. *Elided* represents the self-split and brings the question of existence to mind. *Elided* is communicating an interior and exterior of the self through the signs of fragmentation. It is like a person halfway through one place as he journeys to another or like the mirror in ‘Alice in Wonderland’ that signifies the membrane between two worlds.

The shells of plaster in neutral tones are heavy like armour to represent the ego as the mediator of the outside world and the symbolic importance of the skin. Skin is a physical shield and toughened skin produces a reassuring

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condition of impenetrability, a seductive quality of reflectiveness or shine. The shiny skin, in the frankly metallic gleam of the body- become- machine, inherently becomes the fantasy that skin resists penetration. It is invulnerable because it absorbs nothing, not even light. The sheen of shining skin reduces the body to the spill and shimmer of light. When the light is released across the surface the body can be recognized as an object. The skin borrows the mirror’s shallowness and invisibility. ‘The mirror offers everything to the eye but itself, for you can only ever look in a mirror, never at it. Like a mirror, the skin mirror effaces itself in the visibility it returns to the gaze, but it also retains a certain opacity. Therefore the skin mirror is ultimately narcissistic’.

*Paradisus Terestris, Two, With, Clutching, Elided* demonstrate and divulge the complexities and importance of sexual pleasure when the body joins. They express the compulsion and the inclination to find sensual pleasure. The act of joining the body displays the pleasure we find in touching and the self-rewarding aspect of sex. The works demonstrate humans acting on their needs and while our desires remain numerous, the intriguing need to comprehend them keeps our viewers’ attention.

In each of my works I show three types of pleasure when bodies are joined. *Two* portrays our body and mind in sync relinquishing the need for armour or pretence. It demonstrates to act naturally whether it is primitive or unsightly may in fact make sex more enjoyable. *With* is about how touch is comforting and can express your feelings and emotions better than words ever could. A body touching, joins a couple in a unique body language that cannot be understood by outsiders. Finally, *Elided* presents the satisfaction of giving pleasure to oneself. Pleasure, touching and self-reflection are intrinsically woven and are essential in leading bodies to join.

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Chapter Three: Hang

All symbolic acts can be pleasurable.65

The symbolic act is the action of finding or creating a symbol. People cannot avoid symbolising matter and content when life abounds with them, whether or not the outcome or effect is satisfying. Hence it is this repeated endeavour to invent or search for symbols that must on some level please us. For this reason my work contains symbols of sexual desire. This chapter focuses on the word Hang. Hang is a symbol for the body after sex. The body can be assigned as a symbol in art and I construe the meaning of Hang to be the formless. Therefore I examine art that illustrates the formless featuring the skin, the uncanny, and the natural.

The body as a term, is when an artwork knowingly starts from the human body in a literal sense but soon branches out into a number of directions creating a rich web of ambiguities and multiple interconnections.66 It can describe the things about the body to which no one can put meaning. The body can be expressed imaginatively and is receptive to interpretation. The viewer searches for meaning in the uncertainty and this can be immensely pleasurable as it leaves us open to conjecture about faith, magic and the uninhibited. Elusive, fleeting and baffling as it is, the body can be grasped only as a symbol.67 A symbol represents layers of meanings and each layer can have different content or ideas. It is the ability to move on from familiar objects to relate symbolically to substitute objects. I choose to use it in my practice because I believe it is both a developmental achievement and a move made because of the anxieties involved in relating to primal objects.68 Symbols can be found from an earlier phase in our life and can be radically altered, reassessed or changed due to our life experiences. We adapt to see more deeply. I create the body in the same way as writer Norman Brown. In his novel Love’s Body, he argues how best the body

can be identified, stating that illustrating personality and taking parts of the body to signify it as a whole, is best represented, as a symbol of the genital. In my work an object of a genital can be read as a symbol for the body. A symbol for the body after sex describes the lassitude and languor that is demonstrated in the works I discuss. They can resemble our own body or another person’s but the viewers should grasp a clear message of intention from the artist. They may leave the work without resolving this dilemma. I use the genital in this way to stand for the body to grip, enrich and connect my viewers to their needs and desires.

This chapter looks at my artworks Open and Hang that are a symbol for a couple relaxed after sex. They illustrate a fleshy and bodily sensation that is overcome by tension and climax and dissolves into a limp body. These attributes of a tender and relaxed body after sex can be seen in the work of two other artists in whom I am interested. They are The Boohoohoos by Mikala Dwyer and Hard sand carved out with a stick by Andy Goldsworthy.

Figure 11. Mikala Dwyer, The Boohoohoos, 2000. Synthetic polymer, paint on plastic, 170 x 180cm (overall).

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Australian artist Mikala Dwyer’s *The Boohoohoos* [fig. 11] is composed of loops of polyvinyl chloride that produce the impression they are light like paper which metaphorically build the shell, skin or spirit of the body. These life size pieces hang from the wall and are sagging towards the floor. This makes the framework appear to buckle and fold, creating shapes that suggest genitalia and an impression of looseness, informality and serenity. The colour of the piece is white and sets the tone, as drained yet bright. If it were red, blue or grey the piece could read quite differently. The title, *The Boohoohoos*, implies that tears after sex is a happy occurrence. The three bodies symbolize these tears. They appear like hanging bodies after sex, physically heavy and wet. This work seems to come from an abandoning of form, through chance and seemingly random configurations. It utilises a physical portrayal that allows for such variables as gravity and unpredictability to reflect the working process. This work employs the formless.

Formless is a concept coined by the French philosopher George Bataille. It directs society to perceive and embrace shapelessness. It ignores civilisation’s urge to give shape, definition and structure to the universe. Rather than categorising and rationalising objects and phenomena the formless permits matter that is unknown and undefined or questionable to remain that way. It reveals how contemporary artworks can reinforce the inherent value in a lack of form.

In the sculpture, Dwyer elucidates the concept of the formless with objects that are abject and fluid, which can be metaphors for the loose ends of desire. Dwyer creates parts of the body to stand for an action or an emotion of desire. In this way the work yields to gravity creating an anti-form. This struggle to deconstruct form and find that form is there anyway, drives a forbidden pleasure within. The formlessness in this piece offers physical form or body, back to something that lacks a body, giving a physical form to thought. *The Boohoohoos* illustrates Bataille’s theory of the formless: that it should claim to resemble nothing, especially not what it should be and must assimilate to any

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concept and any abstraction to create ‘nature’s unique monsters’.\textsuperscript{72} In other words Dwyer allows for the significance and beauty that can reside in possibility. Her understanding leads to the acceptance of the potential and validity of chance activity in collapsing the monument of art.\textsuperscript{73} This shows the body expressed freely in attempt to make people materially aware of their unconscious values, beliefs and ideology. \textit{The Boohoohoos} examines our perception of choice with questions of when and what do we choose to notice and why we let other things go unnoticed. The less our perception is skewed the more clearly and intelligibly we perceive. William Blake said, if the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.\textsuperscript{74} \textit{The Boohoohoos} upholds the formless belief that the more abstract, the more interesting.\textsuperscript{75}

Yet another facet of the infinite is in the uncanny. The uncanny comes from the German word Unheimlich which means homely and unhomely. It is a homely atmosphere which can become strange while also being customary. The uncanny may be memories or events once familiar, ‘forgotten material from a collective past that has now been surmounted’.\textsuperscript{76} An uncanny artwork has a viewer feel that something is familiar, yet unknown. It makes an impact of a thing that will resurface later, and continue to haunt the viewer’s mind. An uncanny artwork requires attention without insisting upon it.\textsuperscript{77} It holds the viewer and can strike a chord. When a situation is ambiguous and limits are erased everything becomes mixed up and unsure. Life becomes a moment of brief paradoxes and absurdities. One is left effacing distinctions between imagination and reality, creating an intellectual uncertainty and actions of repetition and mere chance, having involuntary repetitions.\textsuperscript{78} This endless

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} Ibid, 53.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Antony Hudek, \textit{The Object: Documents of Contemporary Art.} (London and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT press, 2014), 125.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Ibid,132.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Ibid,128.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Susan Quinnell, \textit{The Erotic Object: Sexuality in Sculpture from prehistory to present day.} (United Kingdom: Crescent Moon, 2007), 107.
\end{itemize}
repetition can be considered erotic. It is this aspect that I like to explore and symbolise.

Figure 12. Imogen Perry. Open, 2013. Patina, plaster, wire, sisal, size variable.

Open [fig.12] portrays two people after sex, collapsed and slackened due to the primary impulse of the body of desire to be uncanny. It is uncanny because the bodies are in the situation of the unexplored. They appear to be curiously asking each other what will happen next. Open is a series of objects anchored in front of a draped, caked and rumpled skin of sisal and plaster textured like pubic hair. It is a detached mass of abjection, representing something inside and outside the body. It is a sculpture that has ‘thereness or thingness’ for the uncanny to emerge. Open consists of a series of four round, rough-edged plaster frames with widened holes. This piece plays on the cliché thick-skinned, for while it is tough around the outside, the plaster behind has feelings that are tender and sensitive. Here, the body and love continue to work beyond given boundaries into places unknown to reveal our real self, a self found only in sexual recognition and in the thoughts that exist between what we consider normal and what we deem perverse. Due to the uncanny effect being a re-emergence of elements and fragmentary unconscious meanings that come from some primal fantasies, the viewer can remain innocent. The wrapping and hanging of plaster like a frame, acts as a veil to frustrate our ‘lust of the eye’ to

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81 Susan Quinnell, The Erotic Object: Sexuality in Sculpture from prehistory to present day. (United Kingdom: Crescent Moon, 2007), 16.
see more, to see beyond the veil.\textsuperscript{82} The sculpture is a relational object because it allows for fantasy and has no specific nature other than to symbolise the body. As the title \textit{Open} indicates to the viewer, it is a subject to be established with reverie and vision. \textit{Open} is an example of the collective fantasies of the uncertain and everyday space that is inside a person. I would like to present a work of inner passion to appear on the outside. This disclosure may alienate, disorientate or affiliate the viewer. The coalescence of interior and exterior spaces in the plaster and sisal builds an image at once intimate yet strange, simultaneously concealing and exposing disparate spaces.

Other symbolic equations can be the ‘touch’ of the body.\textsuperscript{83} Touch involves stimulation of the skin. The skin houses the body’s most ancient sense- touch.\textsuperscript{84} The skin provides a good opportunity for enquiring into the material imagination because it is bilateral, both matter and image, stuff and sign. It is hard to think without touching your skin. By touching it you can in turn perceive yourself feeling. Touching your skin indicates to you that you are an object and a subject which you can consider and interpret. Skin, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, also reflects our existence as sexual beings.\textsuperscript{85}

\begin{figure}[h]
  \centering
  \includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{figure13.png}
  \caption{Imogen Perry. \textit{Hang}, 2014. Latex, belts, plaster, hessian, size variable (in process).}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 213.
\textsuperscript{84} Steven Connor, \textit{The Book of Skin}. (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 97.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 117.
In this next piece *Hang* [fig.13], skin is used as a symbol for the body during or after sex. *Hang* is an entanglement of skin reacting to the thoughts of sex because the skin is also intimately involved in sexual activity. It can be the largest sexual organ of the human body. The skin of *Hang* is flushed from sexual arousal. It is a vagina that has been hugely swollen from being sexually receptive and is now hanging loosely. The layers of latex are reddened becoming most livid and enlarged. They make up the perineal skin around the external genitalia. The skin drapes around itself, forming a protective covering and screen, defensive against the environment. *Hang* shows the signs of life with impressions of ageing and scars. As John Keats said, ‘touch has a memory’.  

*Hang* is an object materialized using no other means than its outline. This enables the viewer to see the space around it and renders visible the gestures and movement of bodies during the transport. The skin leaves the viewer with an unresolved image that indirectly relates the work to flesh, even tissue. It is like the hanging skin of an ecorche. Without the musculature display of the body it cannot be read literally or methodically. It is a visual depiction of gravity and random piling, loose stacking and hanging. Placed incongruently in an unnatural context, *Hang* poses new questions and engages the viewer in a powerful reassessment of what is familiar and what is alien.

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88 An ecorche is a painting or sculpture of a human figure with the skin removed to display the musculature.

89 Ibid, 98.
Lastly, the work *Hard sand carved out with a stick* [fig.14] by Andy Goldsworthy is a hole in the earth with the surface shaped like a vulva with ridges and layers inside spiralling in and downwards. Nature is carved into a symbol for the body as an erogenous zone to represent nature’s most vague and ephemeral sensations. Goldsworthy’s work is an illustration of the use of the natural. Here he exalts the ephemeral in the folds of our body, in the traces of our history. It is like an open wound of nature, described by Lacan as the kernel of enjoyment that simultaneously attracts and repels us.  

It is a void of that unattainable surplus that sets our desires in motion. It is like staring down a hole that is a space that we cannot know by looking, like a dark space into the night. Goldsworthy says, ‘the work itself determines the nature of its making’. It therefore can take shape because it would have to be a visible and palpable manifestation of Goldsworthy’s thought, which are the tools that help a person see, and which enable something to take form. It is an interaction with nature’s rhythms, cycles, seasons, energies and atmospheres. The circular structure speaks of the primitive, archaic more authentic ethics, the back to nature syndrome. Not only is there a mystical side but also a nostalgic longing for an archaic time, living in harmony with the earth. *Hard sand carved out with a stick* has a mystical feeling, expressed by an exquisite sensitivity of touch, that all-important component in the eroticism of sculpture. Goldsworthy speaks inadvertently of phallic penetration when he says, ‘I want to get under the surface… at its most successful, my ‘touch’ looks into the heart of nature’. 

The gentleness of nature’s natural form is cut, broken and undone. It becomes like scars on the body of the earth. Nature is being dislocated from its usual function. I chose to imagine that this hole was a metaphor for relationships, a seemingly sturdy surface like a partnership that is habitually unnoticed and forgotten – now broken, bringing up the cracks and unspoken flaws to the

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91 Susan Quinell, *The Erotic Object: Sexuality in Sculpture from prehistory to present day*. (United Kingdom: Crescent Moon, 2007), 115.

92 Ibid, 117.
surface. This work exposes what is underneath the surface. It is a metaphor for the deep reservoir of the unknown in our psyche, an inner world of undirected and uncensored thought, suggesting a hole, a metaphor for the body, as the mediator between fiction and reality. This seemingly allows it to become, formless or non-thing as it ‘pertains to an effort to retrieve freedom from any signification outside the event of its own apparition’. 93

Goldsworthy, Dwyer and myself create works symbolizing the body after copulation with the concept of Hang as the overarching symbol. The sculptures are activated through the formless appearing to hold no structure, remaining unpredictable yet having endless meaning. These anti-form works can affect and please the viewer by inviting them to encroach on their instinctual senses. They identify the formlessness of skin, the uncanny and the natural as symbols for sexual desire.

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Conclusion:

My Master of Fine Arts project presents thirty-three works that I have made over the course of two years, encompassing drawing, sculpture, photography and video. The artworks are modest in their choice of materials. Stone, Latex, Plaster and Clay all feature prominently, reworked to have the viewer affected by an experience of desire. The artworks are set in positions of before, during and after sex which I have named *yearn, join* and *hang*. The works speak of my longstanding interest in the primitive, the lover, the lack, touching, self-reflection, uncanny, natural and skin.

This project began with the word ‘couple’. When I noticed that the idea of pairs was shaping my work, I thought I should explore this further. Even the word couple intrigued me. Would I find answers about my own coupling by sculpting it? I began to question what the shape of a couple could be, how it was physically expressed and what could inspire it. I have learnt that these questions cannot be answered entirely because a couple cannot be defined in a finite way. It is complex, always altering and individual. This allowed me the freedom to use ideas and random inferences so that desire could be viewed as trial and error. I would illustrate couple through my practice and research by not endeavouring to solve or define the word. I discovered ideas expounded in art theory, art itself, philosophy and literature, and they informed my own experience to build forms that contain concepts of what a couple actually is. Finally my sculptures of couples do not concern themselves with definitions, they are couples that state that the viewer can interpret the works as they wish.

I have a body of work which suggests interesting hypotheses to contemplate. I knew that I wanted to take a hopeful approach and I know the perspective is a positive outlook on couples. Making them made me think about how a couple might act and appear to be happy. I also remembered reading *Weight* and writer Jeanette Winterson’s ability to personify abstract things. I wanted to apply similar complex ideas to my sculptures. I have done this and have been able to turn my objects into things which imbue this spirit. In the same way a person might act towards their partner, I inflicted simple, sometimes passionate or unruly gestures in my process. I wanted to keep the physical action of building spontaneous and natural. I limited my work to what could be made by my
hands only. I took great care in picking, holding and moulding my shapes as if they were people I cared for. I wanted to pummel, fold, bind, hold and file the raw and textural materials. These were uneven stone, cracked clay and crumbly found objects. I thought that they best represented the senses and emotions of a human relationship that is fragile, primitive and instinctual.

I applied ‘couple’ to my continuing themes of ‘thing’, ‘sex’ and ‘the body’. Approaching couple in this way made the process new yet recognisable and compelling. Couple allowed me to interpret my concepts differently and be made aware of its pervading presence and aware too, of the impact that this made in my process. For me a ‘thing’ is an object or sculpture that has a ‘something’ that can make it stand out from among all other things. I demonstrate a ‘thing’ in my work by making sculptures of couples in yearning. I create forms that long to unite to consummate their inner desires. In my thesis, a couple is a thing of yearning, an object of incomplete desire. I examined objects of desire that are created from the theory behind the terms the lack, the lover and the primitive. I found that to engage with an object of desire is a primitive and compulsive action. This attraction to impulsively re-find and alter perception and memory through objects helps us to reflect on our own understanding of our sexuality. It is far from repressive. An object of desire can be produced when the presence of a lover acts maternally or is similar to oneself. This congruence in a relationship brings elation. We experience life fully when we find the pleasures of our senses. One way that we approach desire is to conceive it as an object. Often this will be an object that reflects our internal desires. It appears as raw erotica- an unclear illustration of our sexuality. The object stays mystifying and intriguing. Desire need not conform to the current ideas of what is socially acceptable.

I explored sex as complex and open to interpretation, an urge that forges our sexual instinct and desires as opposed to our informed and conventional definitions. I demonstrate sex in my practice as a couple that join. This is when two objects connect. In my thesis a couple that join are seen to be in pleasure. Pleasure can stimulate, satisfy, displease and challenge our senses and understandings. Our daily actions are governed by our will to find pleasure. Art that is about sex is an expression of the human need for pleasure. One action of pleasure is when bodies are touching. Through touch people can feel connected.
and express affection. However, postponed urges can lead to enhanced pleasure. As well as the human desire to pursue pleasure with another, there is self-perception and transience as we find pleasure with ourselves.

I examined the body as a symbol firstly in a literal sense. Then I used genitalia as a metaphor for the body. In my practice a couple that are held by the tension of desire are in the shape of two stable objects yearning to join. After joining, the objects become unstable, loose and slack. A couple in the third state becomes formless. The formless can be found in, under, around, behind and beneath form. It works as a sort of undoing, an undoing which remains even when something takes or is given form. I used the uncanny, the natural and skin as ways to create formlessness. The uncanny is when something is familiar yet unknown. Skin touching indicates that the body is an object and subject to discovery and interpretation. It reflects our existence as sexual beings through our gestures and movements. It captures the most unlasting, innate sensations of the body. They are images of things that are engaged- gazing, seducing or flirting with one another. Additionally, there are pieces that fornicate, meld, roll and attach together, while particular bodies are in a state of release. I want the viewer of my works to engage with desire, to feel and be moved by familiar, unknown or a multitude of sensations with sex. I want them to be entangled and surrounded in objects that yearn, join and hang and to understand intellectually that they are things that symbolise the body in sexual need. I want them to reflect on their sensations towards another person remembering the pleasure of sex, whilst the object that I have created transfixes them.


Imogen Perry. *Another*, 2014. 3 x Prints, approx size A4 each.

Imogen Perry. *Joining*, 2014. Film still from the Motion clip (36 sec) of 90 drawings.


Imogen Perry. *Entwined*, 2013. Plaster, cloth, patina, approx L100 x W10 x H1cm.

Objects of Desire:


Reference Lists:

Books/ Journals


*Artworks*


Perry, Imogen. *With*, 2013. Limestone, approx L20 x W15 x H8cm.

Bibliography:

Books/Journals


Smith, Dennis. “"The Civilizing Process" and "The History of Sexuality": Comparing Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault.” Theory and Society, Vol. 28,


*Artworks*


Perry, Imogen. *Another*, 2014. 3 x Prints, approx size A4 each.
Perry, Imogen. *Ardour*, 2013. Soapstone, wax, approx L22 x W10 x H5cm.


Perry, Imogen. *Bare*, 2013. Plaster, sisal, clay, size variable.


Perry, Imogen. *Beneath*, 2013. Limestone, approx L30 x W13 x H16cm.


Perry, Imogen. *Callow*, 2013. Plaster, armature, approx L25 x W9 x H7cm.


Perry, Imogen. *Entwined*, 2013. Plaster, cloth, patina, approx L100 x W10 x H1cm.


Perry, Imogen. *Joining*, 2014. Film still from the Motion clip (36 sec) of 90 drawings.


Perry, Imogen. *Rumple*, 2013. Plaster, hessian, patina, approx L20 x W10 x H1cm.


Perry, Imogen. *With*, 2013. Limestone, approx L20 x W15 x H8cm.

Appendix:

The following pages consist of messages and drawings I made throughout the two years over the course of writing and designing my Master of Fine Arts Project.
My every feeling is controlled by the look on your face.
I am in love with you, can you not see?

I will now roll my body over to creep into the pleasures of thinking about you. Whilst lifting my arm over my eyes the other slowly slides down elsewhere.

I think you are forgetting I read them. You are an embarrassment to our relationship. You have made a fool of me for trusting you. I cannot do this. It makes me uncomfortable thinking about it.

I have been waiting for you to reply.

He did not take her there because he felt ‘known’.

I do not believe people are caring enough to do something, be interested or listen properly even when they love you.

I wish I were with you now.
I am not getting into an argument here.
How many times must I explain it to you?
Would you say that I know you well? That you are what you tell me?

I do not have much faith in love, it is just what you want to comprise for.

As if that response helps me in anyway.
Be at yours around 6pm.

Put some pants on.
Just organising a few things, so afterwards you can have my undivided attention.
I keep thinking about how you cannot understand my face.

It deserved a reply I thought.
She said she loved him and he said he loved her back.

You are actually very loving when given reason to be.
I love you so I feel compromised.
Should I think he is pathetic and laugh it off or should I get upset?
I wake up and feel the warmth of your back beside me.
Sometimes you are really odd about things that do not concern you.
My money is disappearing.