

GRACE KINGSTON

120 DAYS OF
TWEETS
TRANSCENDENT FLESH
-SEQUENTIAL SELVES

Grace Kingston

3164777

BFA Honours 2009

UNSW – College of Fine Arts

Please Note:

To gain a full understanding of this project contextually this paper should be read and graded from its online platform. The addresses for it are:

<http://twitter.com/120daysoftweets>

<http://120daysoftweets.blogspot.com/>

I have included a screenshot of the blogspot address and the twitter address at the beginning of each of the two sections to provide a frame of reference.

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 **120daysoftweets**

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 Location Sydney
 Web [http://120daysoft...](http://120daysoftweets.com)
 Bio Honours Thesis 2009

1 following 17 followers

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RSS feed of 120daysoftweets's tweets

Instructions: These Tweets are chronological, go back and begin reading them from the first one to now ***

7:15 PM Sep 14th from web

Click on my 'web' link, this will take you to a blog of the same name with an introduction & explanation of this project.
 7:14 PM Sep 14th from web

*** It is possible, and encouraged, for you to leave a comment for me through either the blog or twitter account.
 5:11 PM Sep 14th from web

X felt aware of the universe, particle by particle or string by string. And was therefore was at peace for an instant/eternity.
 5:10 PM Sep 14th from web

Time slowed, as Y flesh seemed to meld with the bark of the tree, the atmosphere and the earth.
 5:10 PM Sep 14th from web

Any fears about Y flesh being able to support the weight of her body melted away as Y hung suspended in stasis.
 5:09 PM Sep 14th from web

X heard a clink as carabina's attached to the hooks, took a deep breath in and let it out as Y was hoisted towards the sky.
 5:09 PM Sep 14th from web

Today was to be Y first suspension, Y felt light-headed as skin desperately tried to stretch with the sheer width of the steel.
 5:09 PM Sep 14th from web

X was suddenly jolted out of a nervous daydream as a large steel hook was thrust into Y back flesh.
 5:08 PM Sep 14th from web

Screenshot of the Paper's Online Platform

Twitterers

1. *“One grows tired of the commonplace, the imagination becomes vexed and the slenderness of our means,*
2. *the weakness of our faculties, the corruption of our souls lead us to these abominations” – 120 Days of Sodom*
3. X went outside to have a cigarette, the cold wind rushed past Y freshly pierced nipple, causing the nerve endings to shrink over the steel
4. During the process itself X had felt as though all the nerves in Y body had gathered in the one spot simply to experience this level of pain
5. When the first one was over X felt a load of endorphins coarse through Y body like a heavy comfort blanket, making the next not half as bad
6. X questioned why it was Y wanted to engage in this particular act to mark the end of two significant relationships
7. – a partner and a best friend- and wasn't quite sure
8. Perhaps it was an area to focus on when X constantly ran into them in the bohemian student-y suburb they all lived in
9. Anytime something significantly stressful happened X longed for the feeling of steel, leather or cane
10. It was almost the opposite of taking drugs, where the pain came first and hard, and the pleasure came afterwards
11. X increasingly felt everywhere and nowhere at once. Often when Y saw a plane in the sky Y longed to be sitting in it
12. but the seat would feel like Y suburb – small, cramped and in a state of frozen transience

13. X later had Y ears stretched, Y new partner correctly guessed it was simply for the f**k of it.
14. It felt like a tight pinching while the lubed up stretcher slid through Y ear, tripling the size of the original hole.
15. *“You may get to touch her if your gloves are sterilised, rinse your mouth with Listerine, blow disinfectant in her eyes” – X-Ray Spex*
16. X noticed in the passing weeks that while the newly stretched ear holes healed they collected a chunky white discharge on the jewellery
17. The discharge had a strong musky odour that was unmistakably that of dead flesh
18. It was where the cells had tried to heal the gap now occupied by the foreign body
19. This discharge was quite unlike that of the nipple piercings, a consistent flow of white lymph like fluid that crusted into pus yellow
20. X considered, not for the first time, that one of the outcomes of such piercings was a constant “headlightling” effect
21. In a sense it was like an alternate solution for what blush or bullet bra’s attempted to achieve – a constant state of arousal.
22. X liked Y bodies new sites of transformation, but Y was starting to feel flat and worn out from a busy week of work
23. X had noticed yesterday during the walk to work, ads for tourism and luxury holidays designed for re-invigoration
24. X decided on this day off Y would shuffle 2 bocks up the road and purchase some more bleach and highlighter coloured hair dye

25. X felt the bleach sizzle on Y skin and on the roots of the hair follicles like bacon fat in a pan.
26. *"...prostitution is the logical consequence of the feminine attitude. In so far as she is attractive, woman is a prey to men's desire..."*
27. *the question is at what price and under what circumstances will she yield.*
28. *But if the conditions are fulfilled she always offers herself as an object" – Georges Bataille, 'Eroticism'*
29. X had a slow day at work, spent lying around out the back with the other workers watching cable TV.
30. When the doorbell rang everyone instinctively looked at the security camera, was it one of them or just another one of us?
31. There was always a brief moment of excitement, followed by a flurry of plumping and preening.
32. X went out to meet him, it was almost always a him and while walking down the hallway Y had the usual questions of content
33. but also the usual mix of feelings brewing in the pit of the tummy and a fluttering heart.
34. X feelings were the same now, at the point of first contact, as they were at the end, of their brief encounter
35. - a mix of excitement, cynicism and a pinch of shame, the latter of which was pushed to the back of the mind.
36. X was confident this experience was shared by the others as well, though the shame was usually amplified in him at the finale

37. Forced smiles and pleasant nothings were exchanged as Y exited the room and wandered downstairs to flop back on the couch.
38. Though tiring and potentially dangerous X was generally quite proud of Y work, often feeling like robin hood
39. – taking from the rich conservative and injecting money into the poor alternative circles Y moved in.
40. Even so it was difficult to completely ignore the social taboos that echoed off the bible on to the billboards of the city.
41. X was one of the lucky ones that had come to the profession out of choice and not out of narcotic compulsion
42. but it meant Y mind was clear enough that it frequently came back to a hungry dissatisfaction with existence as it was presented to Y.
43. *“...as long as you are in control of your own attempts to be beautiful, no matter what they are, then they are positive and life affirming.*
44. *Apparently the idea here is that beauty is a beast that must be captured and controlled.*
45. *Everything is fine as long as you are holding the leash” – The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism, Katie Roiphe*
46. X first became aware of Y deviant desires when as a child Y had witnessed an owner disciplining a dog severely.
47. X was intrigued by the disparity between the pained yelps emitted by the animal and the obvious devotion in its eyes.
48. X went home and had practiced similar punishments on Y own dog and was excited by the rush of power

49. and god-like feelings that commanding such sensations on another being gave.
50. X was keen to find the line that of the beast, the point in which it would fear Y forever for the cruelties Y inflicted on it that day.
51. The experience also increased curiosity as to what it would feel like if the roles were reversed.
52. The act of dispensing seemed very detached, it looked as though the victim was the one who was experiencing all the feeling.
53. Not surprisingly this led to Y first experiments in world of BDSM as a teenager with an older dominant.
54. A particularly heavy caning session from that period had left X with a deep purple scar on Y bottom that had hardly faded
55. since the day it was dealt. While essentially it was a badge of honour it was also a mark of shame and a metaphor.
56. It was ugly, there was no getting past it, Y had often wished it could be airbrushed out like cellulite in a magazine.
57. So today X had decided to own Y offence by adding to it, emerging Y-self in it by getting a work of scarification done.
58. The first cut was simply a bloodline, which felt good. But then the repetitious scalpel stabs needed for the correct deepness
59. meant a dull pain started to set in, which was eventually overtaken by an achy stinging that throbbed throughout Y body.
60. The idea was to cultivate a mild infection for ten days to aid in the scarring, so X made sure to keep the area moist at all times.

61. “[P]ain is not an argument against life, but, on the contrary, a stimulant to life, ‘a bait for life’, an argument in its favour” - Deleuze
62. X hadn't always need added sources or stimulants to experience the overwhelming waves of sensations that bodies feel when,
63. being pushed to the brink of exhaustion, almost give in. Indeed X had often experimented with depravation – of breath or nourishment.
64. Starving often felt like turning down the contrast on life, if waking were white and sleeping were black X felt like grey at all times.
65. Originally X thought such practices were simply to lose weight but really Y knew they were efforts to control spiralling emotions
66. and a life that X felt had too many others trying to govern it. There were others like Y as well, at school and on the internet.
67. All would suffer in silence in the company of non-believers, but often wearing a red bracelet to signify this united and celebrated pain.
68. This code was started in U.S.A in the mid-nineties, and to this day X would still look for it on the wrists of pained stick figures in the street.
69. X remembered the feeling of power and privilege of denying oneself, hearing the secret reverberations of angst inside
70. an empty stomach. But 5 years of withholding in formative years had left significant scars both inward and outward.
71. X had stretchmarks almost all over from sudden losses and gains. Bones were brittle, memory poor
72. and Y was much shorter than Y ought to be. X sometimes missed the looks of envy from others about Y ‘miracle weight loss’,

73. but they had no way of knowing the price. The entire time X practiced it was the only thing Y was able to think about.
74. X still thought about it often, and relapsed briefly in times of stress, but it was only natural – it was always in the back of the mind.
75. Like so many other things, once the door was opened it would never be able to be completely shut again.
76. *“Custom represents the experiences of men of earlier times as to what they supposed useful and harmful - but the sense*
77. *for custom (morality) applies, not to these experiences as such, but to the age, the sanctity, the indiscussability of the custom*
78. *and so this feeling is a hindrance to the acquisition of new experiences and the correction of customs:*
79. *that is to say, morality is a hindrance to the development of new and better customs: It makes stupid.” – Nietzsche*
80. X realised that promiscuity has been frowned upon in most cultures for a long time, and for fairly obvious reasons.
81. The high death rate during child birth, and later the development of sexually transmitted diseases and of course, lots of kids to care for
82. were all reasonable arguments against promiscuity. But since the development of condoms, dental dams and gloves
83. X felt as though contemporary morality was lagging. Now for the first time, we could answer our basic instincts without fear.
84. X found the latex to be both a physical and an emotional barrier, allowing Y to get close to partners without them leaving a trace.

85. After the act the physical evidence of fluid and latex was instantly transformed into a thing of disgust, and quickly disposed of.
86. In the 21st century *le petite mort* had an actual corpse: the used condom, and it was found in bins, streets and toilets across the globe.
87. Their wrinkly flaccid shape, thoughtlessly discarded was a sad monument to the excitement it had previously facilitated.
88. X was amazed and the versatility of them, besides the literal phallus they could be used on it's artificial cousins: dildos and butt plugs
89. as well as covering the balls on communal gags. Gloves also could be used traditionally, or cut open and spread to be used as a dam.
90. 21st century sex now smells different - of powder and rubber or artificial fruit. It reminded X of lollies at the doctors clinic.
91. *"One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female*
92. *presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between, male and eunuch,*
93. *which is described as feminine"* - Simone de Beauvoir
94. The distance between the two accepted genders was something that X had always found fascinating, especially the flags that someone
95. on one end of the spectrum felt they needed to have to move over to the other side, and what that reflected within society.
96. For example, men who wished to experience being a woman would still ask X for clothing that reflected age old female stereotypes

97. – angel or whore. For the former they wanted lace, light pinks and floral, to become the innocent ‘school girl’ or the demure ‘bride’.
98. These gentlemen wanted to be seduced or ‘forced’ into submission, to have their innocence taken away by the cruel dominant.
99. For the latter they wanted black and red suspender belts, fishnet stockings, corsets and heels and to be cruelly f***ed,
100. after all, they deserved it considering they were such sluts, as that’s apparently all ‘sluts’ want.
101. Women however wanted facial hair, their breasts taped down, their hair and nails cut short and a really big bulge in their pants.
102. And thus playing up to the stereotype of the ‘real man’ who must be hairy and well endowed to be taken seriously as a man.
103. X had also found that genitals could also temporarily cross-dress if they wanted to. Women had only to strap on a cock,
104. X had even seen new realistic ones which could have the scrotum filled with fluid, ready to ejaculate at the press of a button.
105. And with men, one pinned their penis’ down with temporary piercing needles in a spiral shape with the head in the middle
106. allowing the shaft to act as labial lips, the head to act as a large bulbus clitoris and the anus to act as a vagina.
107. Through each addition X wondered at which point it was they felt they had crossed the line into the their desired gender role.
108. *“pity this busy monster, manunkind,/ not. Progress is a comfortable disease/ your victim (death and life safely beyond)*

109. *plays with the bigness of his littleness/--- electrons deify one
razorblade/ into a mountainrange; lenses extend*
110. *unwish through curving wherewhen till unwish/ returns on its unself./ A
world of made/ is not a world of born --- pity poor flesh*
111. *and trees, poor stars and stones, but never this/ fine specimen of
hypermagical” – ee cummings*
112. X was suddenly jolted out of a nervous daydream as a large steel hook
was thrust into Y back flesh.
113. Today was to be Y first suspension, Y felt light-headed as skin
desperately tried to stretch with the sheer width of the steel.
114. X heard a clink as carabina’s attached to the hooks, took a deep breath
in and let it out as Y was hoisted towards the sky.
115. Any fears about Y flesh being able to support the weight of her body
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120 DAYS OF TWEETS

HONOURS THESIS 2009

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2009

Instructions

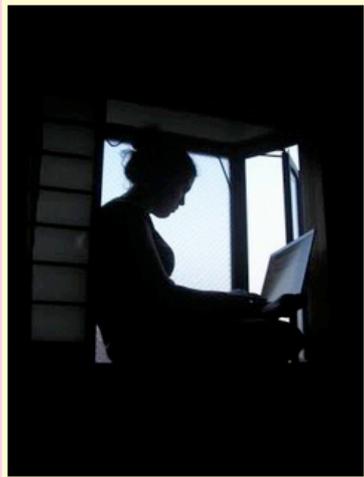
This blog accompanies a twitter account of the same name:

<http://twitter.com/120daysoftweets>

They can be read in any order.

This Thesis accompanies a collection of Artwork, which can be viewed *in the flesh* from November 24th 2009 at the College of Fine Art, Oxford St & Greens Rd, Paddington NSW 2021

Or to view my profile for this exhibition please go to: annual.cofa.unsw.edu.au/2009 (this website will go live on November 24th, 2009)



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ABOUT ME



120DAYSOFTWEETS

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Screenshot of the Paper's Online Platform

Honours Thesis 2009

Grace Kingston BFA

College of Fine Art - UNSW

Transcendent Flesh – Sequential Selves

This thesis is predicated on the limits of flesh and the exploration of its synthetic extensions. I aim to mirror the process of body modification and sexual exploration - cumulative bursts of energy to complete a narrative of experience. This concept has been explored in two ways; my studio work is based around a collection of mixed media works revolving around latex, rubber and inorganic material used as a metaphor for the artificial body. Whereas my thesis paper is based around the medium of Twitter; this concept stems from the idea that online persona(s) are an extension of the embodied identity and can therefore be considered a new form of costume.

Twitter

Twitter is a social networking concept consisting of short status updates that seek to answer the question “*What are you doing right now?*” When you Twitter something

it posts your message in the feed of whoever is following you, similarly you can read what all your friends are Twittering in your own feed. You can only post text on Twitter and there is a limit of 140 characters for each Tweet, which approximates around 25 English words.

“Like SMS and texting, Twitter forces users to economize on the many superfluous articles demanded in formal English, generating a simplified grammar like a pidgin. Some of the same quirks of English that are eliminated in Twitter-speak are also neglected in different vernacular dialects, things like helping verbs or articles.”¹



Image: Twitter Screenshot from twitter.com

Twitter isn't limited to personal friends, or indeed to individuals at all. Many celebrities, businesses, brands and blogs have signed up to Twitter to use as a

¹ <http://neuroanthropology.net/2009/04/14/fear-of-twitter-technophobia-part-2/> accessed on 10/09/09

publicity tool. Essentially what makes twitter so appealing is the fact that it is free, quick, global and easily accessed on personal mobile devices.

“The rise of the internet has challenged our minds in three fundamental and related ways: by virtue of being participatory, by forcing users to learn new interfaces, and by creating new channels for social interaction. Almost all forms of online activity sustained are participatory in nature”²

By posting this paper through free online avenues I have not only made it more accessible than a physical essay but similar to the spirit many Fluxus artworks were made in. I have posted a set of instructions and have actively opened up a chance for interaction, a dialogue between myself and the reader through the opportunity to comment.

“Fluxus works create a diverse experiential framework, one characterized by the dissolution of boundaries dear to Western epistemology, including the traditional distinction between subject and object on which much of Western philosophy was historically based. The result is [a] “non-hierarchical density of experience.”³

The twitter component of this paper becomes a collection of aphorisms, sensory descriptions and personal reflections by a fictionalised online persona. This online

² Johnson, Steven *‘Everything Bad is Good For You: How Today’s Popular Culture is Actually Making us Smarter’* New York, New York, Penguin Group Ltd (2005) Pg. 117-118

³ Higgins, Hannah *‘The Fluxus Experience’* California: University of California Press (2002) Pg. 12

persona was developed through research into personal accounts of people aiming to push the limits of their flesh, such as but not limited to: sex workers (working in both the straight and BDSM domain)⁴; professional body modifiers and enthusiasts⁵; eating disorder or body dysmorphic disorder sufferers⁶ and transgender individuals⁷.

I feel that the nature of the topic of body modification and sexual practice can only be truthfully investigated through a personal narrative, as opposed to the detached and impersonal character of the essay.

“... the erotic still arouses acute moral anxiety and confusion... the strong emotions it undoubtedly arouses gives to the world of sexuality a seismic sensitivity making it a transmission belt for a wide variety of needs and desires: for love and anger, tenderness and aggression, intimacy and adventure, romance and predatoriness, pleasure and pain, empathy and power. We experience sex very subjectively.”⁸

The name of this online project comes from Marques De Sade’s ‘120 Days of Sodom’, in which a story is told each day by the story teller to inspire the content of the *libertine*’s orgy that night. Similarly I have started each ‘session’ of twitters with a

⁴ Information was gathered from and aided by Sydney’s Scarlet Alliance – the Sex Workers Union, and mistresses from Sydney’s *Salon Kittys*.

⁵ Information was gathered from BMEzine.com and from the staff at Sydney’s Polymorph Body Piercing Studio.

⁶ Some information was gathered from personal accounts but the majority of which was gathered from various pro-anorexia websites such as <http://www.proanamia.com/>

⁷ Much of this information was gathered from Sydney’s Gender Centre website and their publication *Polare*. Other information was gathered from individuals from Sydney’s queer community such as performers at the Sly Fox hotel and attending discussions with queers and ‘gender terrorists’ from Tu-Tu (formerly known as NewQ) Queer-space at 22 Enmore Rd.

⁸ Weeks, Jeffrey ‘Sexuality’ (1986) New York NY Routledge, Chapman and Hall Inc. Pg. 11

quote to inspire the content of discussion. And like the vastly different backgrounds of the storytellers of '*120 Days of Sodom*', the origin of the quotes chosen to inspire the tweets range from figures of pop culture to philosophers.

Each session can be considered a short chapter in which I have discussed respectively:

1. Exploration born from restlessness and anxiety
2. The western obsession with sterilisation and therefore the disconnection we feel with the natural processes of our bodies
3. Body as a business site and the western shame condition
4. Beauty, perversion and power dynamics
5. Pain as a valid sensation no less enjoyable than pleasure and the comfort of control
6. The power and the disposability that comes with sexual liberation
7. Gender roles, the in-between and how gender play eloquently reveals societal attitudes
8. How Unconventional practices can bring us closer to a state of transcendence.

The sessions do bear much relation to each other, like a traditional linear narrative would, but are instead a collection of separate bursts of energy, like separate modifications united on one body. The final session discusses a suspension, which many practitioners describe as a euphoric experience, and aims to portray a sense of transcendence and spiritualism.

Social networking sites are one of the most popular forms of social interaction in the 21st century, indeed many people employ them exclusively for things like event promotion and to remember important dates. While in theory social networking sites were set up to help one re-connect with old acquaintances or friends abroad, it has instead diminished the need to physically socialise with anyone at all. We feel reasonably satisfied that we have caught-up with someone on our “friends list” when we hear what they’re doing via status updates or through the pictures they upload. Most of the time all the major news of an individuals life can be found by simply scrolling through their profile page, new jobs, fun parties and the ever-vexing ‘relationship status’ is all there, along with comments from everyone on their friends list about the changes.

Your profile page can be personalised to represent you as an individual, unless of course there aren’t enough boxes for you or appropriate options on the drop down list. The most obvious of these are the forced gender roles, when twittering my project I wanted to stay anonymous and gender neutral, as well as objectifying my persona, so I substituted the symbol “X” wherever a name was needed and “Y” wherever a gender pronoun was needed. The introduction of symbols purposely upsets the flow of the narrative in a similar way a transgender individual upsets the flow of western society⁹ by not adhering to norms. This theory is supported by the fact that the readers find themselves unconsciously substituting a gender pronoun

⁹ I use the term “Western Norms” here as many traditional indigenous societies have space for more than two genders, such as Polynesian Fa'afafine and Aboriginal Australian Sistagirls

where the symbol is present to make sense of the information more easily.

Unfortunately during the set-up process I was forced to choose, male or female, there is little room for trans individuals and in-betweens on social networking sites or indeed within society itself.

*"...our notions of what a human being is problematically depend on there being two coherent genders. And if someone doesn't comply with either the masculine norm or the feminine norm, their very humanness is called into question."*¹⁰

Each action or change an individual makes to their online account is noted down on their profile, like mark making or modification: the sum of these actions is an ongoing narrative of the body. It is this point exactly that I make with my studio work.

Artwork

My studio work is a collection of latex and mixed media works ranging in scale and dimension. Each of the pieces is mounted on the wall, pinned down, or placed on plinth/cabinet type surfaces. In some cases there are simply outlines of pieces suggesting an absence of body. By presenting the works in this way they are suggestive of a cross between a handyman's tool shed, a fetish dungeon's equipment panel and a niche boutique.

¹⁰ Butler, Judith 'The Believer Magazine' - Interview - Issue 2, published online at: http://www.believermag.com/issues/200305/?read=interview_butler accessed on 19/08/09



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Image: the Main Dungeon at Sydney's 'Salon Kittys'

¹¹ <http://salonkittys.com/salonkittys/tour/main.shtml> accessed on 19/08/09

I have used materials and taken inspiration largely from the places that aid in the experiences I seek to reference, sex and fetish shops as well as piercing and body modification parlours. Latex as the primary medium is used to represent simulated flesh, the artificial additions to the body.



Image: Kingston, Grace: Stuffed Latex Handcuffs

A sense of tension, or the feeling of pain that accompanies modification is felt through a variety of features in the work. Such as objects protruding behind the latex,

- suggestive of silicone subdermal implants. Or hooks stretching the latex out to the brink of tearing - similar to modern day suspension practices.



Image: Robert Valenti doing a suspension performance at Sydney's Powerhouse Museum with the performance group Modified Souls (28/08/09). (Photograph taken by myself)

It should be noted that many contemporary body modifications are rooted in traditional indigenous cultural practices, and bring up moral issues of cultural appropriation.

“Modern primitivism both confounds and plays on historically produced borders between so-called primitive and civilised bodies. The modern primitivist movement self-consciously rejects the deeply ethnocentric tradition of the West, and instead extends nostalgic views of indigenous cultures as more authentic, natural, and communal. It does this partly as an extension of modernity’s longstanding unease with its own technological advances, ecological destruction, and cultural homogenisation, generating images of primitivism that appear to offer alternative, more traditionally rooted modes of negotiation nature and the body. At the same time, the movement also employs very contemporary, post-modern notions of identity, culture, and the body, presenting each as malleable and elective.”¹²

I am aware that I owe much of the inspiration for my artwork to artists like Orlan, who have explored these ideas in works like ‘*Self Hybridisation*’. However much has already been said about the *Modern Primitive* phenomenon and it is therefore not the aim of this paper to delve into this area any further.

¹² Pitts, Victoria *In the Flesh: the Cultural Politics of Body Modification* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan (2003) Pg. 124



Image: Orlan: From the series 'Self Hybridisation' sourced from orlan.net

Similarly I have purposely avoided the one area of body modification – tattoos - for the simple reason that as a 2D image sitting on top of the flesh, they do not change the topographical nature of the body (besides the slight raised nature of a fresh tattoo) and are therefore not stretching the limits of the flesh, but rather, altering the aesthetic of the skin. Also their cultural and historical nature is simply too dense to fit in a justified discussion of them in this paper.

My practice has previously revolved around figure painting of which I have explored both traditionally and through abstraction. The crux of inspiration for this collection of work is the limits of the flesh – stretching, pulling, perforating, tenderising and constricting - and how, through these acts, we aim to reach a state of transcendence. This voyage into the unknown was previously taken in a literal way, a change in locality. But since the onset of Globalisation and through the establishment of the Internet, the world has become accessible so there is virtually nowhere left to be explored and tested, except the personal locality of our body.

Many pieces have a wooden frame that serve to anchor the work in the discipline of painting. All the works have rounded edges to pay homage to the humble dental dam, which is in many cases stretched over the frame, as it was this material that first inspired this collection of work. The dental dam as a concept is highly unique in this sphere as Latex clothing is worn primarily for aesthetics and sensation and condoms are worn only for birth control and to stop the transmission of STDs.



Image: Grace Kingston (work in progress from the 'Transcendent Flesh' Series



Image: Grace Kingston (work in progress from the 'Transcendent Flesh' Series

However dental dams are viewed by most people as superfluous, their point was to stop the transmission of STDs through cunnilingus or anilingus, and are known jokingly as “lesbian condoms”. But there are few people who actually use them, as it is reasonably difficult for most STD’s to spread from oral contact with the genitals.

“Candida and bacterial vaginosis were common. Trichomoniasis, genital warts, and genital herpes were infrequently diagnosed, and pelvic inflammatory disease, chlamydia, and gonorrhoea infections were rare. It appears that trichomoniasis, genital herpes, and genital warts may be sexually transmitted between women, but there is no evidence for woman to woman transmission of gonorrhoea, chlamydia, or PID.”¹³

In fact the only demographic that really uses Dental Dams are sex workers, owing to the logistics of their work.

The Dental Dam acts as a latex barrier to direct sexual contact, it masks the impression of the intimate. Similarly much of my studio work involves the impression of the body, photographically and literally through mould and casts. The artificial nature of latex smooths out the natural dimples and imperfections of the body, like an airbrush on a photo. However it also clings and suffocates the body, forcing a sweaty reaction from it, a poignant metaphor of the post-modern condition.

¹³ <http://sti.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/80/3/244> BMJ Sexual Health e-journal. Accessed on 19/09/09

Some of the bodies and parts of bodies are my own, whereas some are of guests, male and female. It is easy to draw comparison between my own work and Julie Rapp's, in particular '*Vital Statistics*' (1997) and '*Untitled (after Manet's 'Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe')*' (2002)



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Image: Rrap, Julie: Vital Statistics 1997

¹⁴ Image sourced from: <http://ngvartbeat.org.au/collection/pub/itemDetail?artworkID=60694>
accessed on 19/08/09



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Image: Rrap, Julie: Untitled (after Manet's 'Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe'), 2002

In particular Rrap's obsession with exploring the body and the forms it takes on expressed in a multi-disciplinary approach. Many of the mediums and palettes are similar to my practice as well, using rubber and flesh tones¹⁶ as a base, intermixed with the occasional hyper-real colour.

However there are some critical differences, namely that the subjects of my works is not only my body, or of my gender, but of others as well. Through this critical difference I am to steer away from the traditional feminist discussion that comes with the inclusion of nude female images in art. Rather through these impressions of and

¹⁵ Image sourced from: http://www.roslynxley9.com.au/artists/32/Julie_Rrap/78/35145/ accessed on 19/08/09

¹⁶ It should be noted that the term "flesh colour" refers to the pinkie-white colour of Anglo-Europeans, which is generally considered the norm within western society.

on the body, of varied permanence, I aim to suggest a continuing discomfort with our bodies as they were given to us.



Image: Kingston, Grace: from the series 'Transcendent Flesh'

Another theme throughout this collection of work is that of the hammer and the anvil, a metaphor originally used in *'Venus in Furs'*



Image: Kingston, Grace 'Flesh Hammers'

"You must be hammer or anvil" it is absolutely appropriate to the relation between man and woman... Woman's power lies in man's passion, and she knows how to use it, if man doesn't understand himself. He has only one choice: to be the tyrant

over or the slave of woman. As soon as he gives in, his neck is under the yoke, and the lash will soon fall upon him.”¹⁷

From this I have developed a number of soft sculptures of hardware tools, sex toys and BDSM equipment with fleshy latex and jelly wax, some direct impressions and some sewn translations. The flaccid nature of these mediums subverts the original meaning of the phrase, and intends to be a discussion of the grey area of power relationships that are discovered through Sado-masochistic sexual exploration.



Image: Kingston, Grace 'Flesh Anvil'

¹⁷ Sacher-Masoch, Leopold *'Venus in Furs'* New York, NY: Penguin Classics, Penguin Group Ltd (2000) Pg. 14

Conclusion

Through this work I discuss and explore, rather than find a definitive answer to a contemporary idea of the new body and the reasoning behind the modern rituals and practices we take part in. I have achieved this by producing a multi-disciplinary collection of studio works based around the medium of latex as a symbol of artificial flesh and synthetic additions to the body. I have also investigated these themes in a theoretical sense through a collection of aphorisms authored by my fictional online character, based around the idea that online identities through virtue of being anonymous are a new form of costume and can therefore be considered a temporary theoretical modification of the self.

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