Becoming Ornament
An Exploration of Ornament as a Technique for Bringing the Group to Presentation

Jessica Kritzer
orcid.org/0000-0003-1308-4250

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School of Art
Faculty of The Victorian College of the Arts and The Melbourne Conservatorium of Music
The University of Melbourne
Abstract

_Becoming Ornament: An Exploration of Ornament as a Technique for Bringing the Group to Presentation_ looks at the intersection between groups and ornament. The research explores ornament as a method to engender notions of collectivity and proposes the group as a type of ornament with its perception predicated upon the negotiation of surfaces. The research frames both groups and ornament as active practices or techniques that create and experiment with physical and conceptual environments coextensive with surface. The project explores these surfaces as contingent, unstable and multivalent, approaching groups and ornament through 21st century conceptualizations such as affect, mediation and dynamic entitativity. The creative works generated by and in response to this research take the form of moving image works and photograph. These works were presented for public exhibition at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery in June 2016. They can be viewed at [http://vimeo.com/jessicakritzer](http://vimeo.com/jessicakritzer).
Declaration

• The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated.
• Due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other material used.
• The thesis is fewer than 40,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices as approved by the Research Higher Degrees Committee

Jessica Kitzner
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Introduction

This research considers the seemingly discreet domains of group and ornament to explore ornament as a method to engender group. The project formulates the notion of the group-ornament in order to investigate the conceptual and pictorial information that results when features associated across these two categories are considered in relation to each other. The research engages with the renewed interest in and the shifting acceptances of ornament that are occurring in the early 21st century. In particular it focuses on theories that approach ornament as a physical and conceptual environment coextensive with surface,1 reflecting contemporary discussions that frame ornament within light of its surface agency. This situates ornament within an experiential and relational field of operation that accommodates a discussion of ornament that moves beyond passive reception to active construction. Ornament in this instance is discussed as a family of practices concerned with the adornment, decoration or enhancement of surface to articulate a collective form. Working closely with ideas surrounding groups and ornament in general and more specifically in artworks, moving image, cinema and social mise en scène, the research positions groups and ornaments as existing within a social code of arrangement predicated on presentation and display. The research is instigated within the realm of visual art and culminates in the pictured group however the distinctions between actual groups and imaged groups are infinitely blurred with all groups in a sense operating on an imaginary level. This project explores the potential of the constitutive element in ornament to disclose the group as a creating process and an aesthetic form.

The project pursues and develops theories that feature ornament as a dynamic practice and highlight ornamentation as a structure of exchange. The research works towards the identification and development of techniques for bringing the group to presentation through the activation of an equipped surface. In this way ornament is conceptualized as a technique that utilizes surface agency to establish connectivity. The perception that a collection of individuals forms a group is described by the term entitativity. The research develops the hypothesis that the activity and character of group entitativity is deeply invested in the deployment and negotiation of surfaces and

that these surfaces are customized through ornament in order to form an expression of group-ness. Ornament is approached as an expanded field whose original concern is the articulation of surface. The project explores decoration, detail, style, gesture and manner as surface modifiers and positions these activities as applications or treatments that fit within the broadened conceptualization of contemporary ornament. The research identifies the group itself as a type of ornament and situates it within the ornamental dimension. It asks the question how can the group be articulated as ornament?

Jonathan Hay writes in “The Passage of the Other: Elements for a Redefinition of Ornament” that the concept of articulation was already well established in late 19th century discussions of ornament. He explains,

Articulation has two basic meanings—(a) to join things in such a way that coordinated movement is possible, and (b) to express something in coherent form. This split of meaning gives articulation the capacity to make visible the double sidedness of artistic craft, and it is this capacity that makes the concept so useful in characterizing theoretical approaches to ornament… Moreover, articulation involves a process that is liable to betray itself; in other words, the ostensible intention of purpose does not exhaust the result. Thus a fully articulated surface does not only achieve a sought-for relational coherence but may also incorporate into itself residues of doubt and anxiety, which can be symptomatic of the greatest social significance and reward close interpretive attention.²

This research suggests that presenting the group through the lens and technique of ornament preserves the original point of departure for the group from other expressions of collectivity—that of intentionality, performance, artfulness and uncertainty.

Part One

Part one begins with a brief review of ornament. The research locates ornament within a Eurocentric perspective while acknowledging it has a global and diverse tradition. This section discusses ornament with reference to its Western history and the varied and often pejorative associations that persist in its configuration. A

discussion of Adolph Loos’s *Ornament and Crime* and the Modernist ban on ornament as well the equation of ornament with immorality, artifice and the feminine are noted. This is in order to illustrate the traditionally negative and marginalized habitat that attends 20th century ornament. Part one continues onto the late 20th and early 21st centuries, which have embraced a renewed engagement and reevaluation for ornament. Examples of new theoretical approaches include Oleg Grabar’s vision of an active and mediating role for ornament and Farshid Moussavi’s proposal that the function of ornament is affect. This history is important to the research because it frames ornament as a continuing site for contest, dialogue, proposition and knowledge. Ornament is shown to encompass and extend beyond a two-dimensional pattern on a material artifact.

Once a working understanding of ornament is established for the project, the research narrows to locate conceptualizations that relate ornament to the body. These include the notion of decorum; disciplines that deal with groups such as archaeology, anthropology and ethnography; Loos’s attack on ornament as inseparable from the body; discourses that link morality and amorality with the use of ornament; and the genesis of ornament in the performance of rhetoric. These ideas do not emanate from one particular historical period but are scattered throughout the history of ornament. They are nominated as ideas that situate ornament in direct relation to bodies and act as proof that although appearing as distinct and distant concepts, ornament and groups share convergences. The research suggests one point of union is in both groups and ornament being seen in the light of activity rather than as entities that are inherently present. Ornament and group activated as verbs rather than as nouns. This notion of activity is fundamental to the original hypothesis that *group-ness* has a deep concern for the negotiation of surfaces. In this way the group-ornament entity presents a dynamic proposal rather than a reified object. It is also central to the development of the group-ornament as an item that has the potential to be researched through artistic practice and explored through making.

Part Two

Part two establishes a theoretical framework for the notion of the group. Groups are discussed with reference to Donald T. Campbell’s concept of entitativity. At its
simplest, entitativity speaks to the perception of ‘togetherness’ for a collection of individuals. Campbell framed entitativity from the perspective of those outside the group but new theories of dynamic entitativity, which envision the task of group formation as internal to the group are also examined. This section notes Hannah Wojciehowski’s central hypothesis, which ties the discovery of the Laocoön with the emergence of the word gruppo during the Renaissance. This is to develop an understanding of the concept of group as directly emanating from the world of art and to explore the characterizing perception of the group as a creation associated with artifice and performance. Siegfried Kracauer’s essay The Mass Ornament is discussed as an example of collectivity being imagined and imaged in terms of ornament, along with Benedict Anderson’s hypothesis that all communities are imaginary and distinguished by the style in which they are imagined. This section positions external organization as a primary site for presenting or generating notions of the group. It positions the group as disambiguated from other forms of collectivity by nature of its intentional production and its ambiguous state. It highlights the interface between groups and ornament at the site of the social body, imagination, artifice, creation and visual persuasion and frames this arrangement as a generating source rather than a final destination.

Part Three

Part three deals with the specific ideas, artists and artworks that underpin the practical component of this project. This section begins with ornament discussed as having the capacities of Derrida’s philosophy of the supplement. It suggests the ambiguity intrinsic to ornament allows it to be imagined as something both added and indispensible. And highlights its paradoxical ability to create and blur boundaries between artifact and carrier. Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming is explored as a mode of production that utilizes proximity to transfer ornamental qualities across the boundaries of things and figures. Both concepts are investigated as a series of technical coordinates that contribute to establishing conceptual and physical movement for the project’s artworks.

Gottfried Semper’s theory of Schmuck and Aby Warburg’s theory of bewegtes Beiwerk (accessories in motion) are identified and explored as theories that affirm
bodily adornment as ornament. Semper’s theory in particular approaches ornament as grounded in real artifacts such as garments, jewelry and hairstyle. He promotes ornament as a category of objects that have weight and physical dimensions. He proposes their use as a method of expressing modes of being in the world. The research identifies Semper and Warburg as sharing the notion that ornament in the form of bodily adornment has the capacity to express both physical and conceptual movement for its carriers. This section outlines how the project actively engages with these ideas from the point of view of technique by focusing on the material addition of adornment as a method to give visual expression to a group in a picture and maneuver this expression towards ornament.

The Rococo is examined as a style associated with contingency, frivolity, pleasure, femininity and the ornamental. The project positions the Rococo as a style that persistently points to its own fancifully decorative surface as an experimental and temporal construct rather than an absolute. Andy Warhol, Yinka Shonibare and Sophia Coppola are discussed as artists who use Rococo imagery as a stylistic method to critique and construct representations of sexuality, race and gender. The painted groups of Antoine Watteau are examined as depictions of ornamental and enigmatic assemblies that continue to remain open to multidisciplinary interpretations. Through these works the Rococo is explored as a “cultural mode of being, thought and representation rather than exclusively as a formal idiom”.

Antoine Watteau’s fête galante paintings, along with the films of Yorgos Lanthimos and Kelly Reichardt are explored as visual works that present the group by attending to its surface. The exterior of the group is the focus for these artists as they attenuate narrative causality and highlight the group by showing the group. The works build social cohesion through a handling of the material surface of the figures and primarily position the group as an exterior presence. The research suggests that by treating the group as a surface and allowing the exterior presence of the group to operate as its own determining event or subject opens a picture of a group to multiple conceptual forms and apprehensions. The research suggests that this exteriorized approach to the group emphasizes the constructing and contingent nature specific to the group.

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3 Melissa Hyde, Making up the Rococo: Francois Boucher and His Critics (California: Getty Publications, 2006), 11.
aligns this quality to ornament and this method of presenting the group as forming a type of ornamental technique.

Part Four

Part four deals with the practical works of the thesis. It addresses the experiments and rationale behind the moving images as individual works, discussing the concerns particular to each work. The project is concerned with delivering the group as a type of ornament and focuses on the exterior of the group supplemented by ornament to become ornament or group-ornament. The visual works test various way of doing this. This section addresses the details and objects, the camera arrangements and directing methods, as well as the editing styles that were tested to build a group whose appearance can be understood as enacted through and within the terms of ornament.

This project looks at how the group can be articulated as ornament. In other words it seeks to give voice to the ornamental qualities in groups and the methods by which ornament accomplishes or presents the group. The research searches for points where groups and ornament overlap and identifies characteristics they share in common. There is an ever-increasing amount of publication concerned with ornament and its acceptances for the 21st century. All point to the existence of a general ornamental dimension with a multiplicity of expressions. This project questions how the group can be included in this multiplicity. In a sense the project juggles two threads. The first is the group configured as ornament and the second is the ornament configuring the group. Working with these two strands in conjunction and not shutting one pathway down in favour of the other has proved tricky but productive. The research identifies this dual space as the producing space of the group-ornament. It can be argued that the marginalization of ornament and the valorization of the individual in 20th century culture (and art) produced an attenuated understanding and decreased artistic handling for both ornament and groups. This project reengages with these ideas and proposes them in a combinatory form, utilizing visual art to interrogate ornament as a vehicle of expression for the group and the decorated group surface as a method to explore (practice) the aesthetic construct of togetherness.
PART ONE: Ornamental Values

Introducing Ornament

It is an interesting phenomenon that ornament at first thought appears to be a simple proposition. It is a type of object, a Christmas bauble, something to do with pattern and ground, perhaps geometries or decoration or something added to something else as an unnecessary surface. In reality, with the merest scratch upon that surface, ornament reveals itself in defiance of all standard operating definitions. It is in fact a complex and intricate concept with ancient histories and with all cultures offering their own various interpretations, prohibitions and sanctifications regarding its use and status. It is impossible to conceive of ornament as contained within a single proposition. Even a discussion of ornament within specific contexts such as the art-historical or the social is fraught with the impossibility of separating the product from its production, as well as the different and often conflated understandings of what characteristics or attributes are included in an idea of ornament for a particular discipline. In an attempt to cultivate a working notion of ornament, I will nominate key historical understandings and hypothetical positions that have precipitated during the course of the research. These particular inclusions and interpretations do not form a complete survey of the field of ornament but rather are ideas and events surrounding ornament that prove the most pertinent to the research and provide a fertile ground from which to extrapolate.

As an artist working within a Western tradition I will begin with a quick review of the classic, mostly Eurocentric positioning of ornament. This is to acquaint the reader with a selection of ideas that have gained prestige in the Western tradition over time. It is important to keep in mind the Eurocentric locus that pervades the conception as well as the narrative of ornament. As James Trilling writes in The Language of Ornament, “A hundred years ago, one could write an introduction to Western ornament and call it an introduction to ornament. It was not that scholars, or even the educated public, lacked a global perspective: non-Western styles were widely known and admired. However, only a few innovative art historians saw the world, or even
Eurasia, as an historical whole. When it came to charting the evolution of styles, Western ornament was the model; everything else was ancillary”.4

A Traditional Approach

A classificatory approach to ornament can be found in Yale University Professor of Architecture Kent Boomer’s lecture Why Not Ornament? Bloomer segregates ornament from other surface information by discussing it in terms of its being a detail rather than a decoration. He positions decoration as a system of organizing décor, which is the visual manifestation of ‘good taste’ and subordinates ornament as a detail that serves decoration. For Bloomer the ornament operates in the liminal or interstitial spaces of an object, an example being the Greek key pattern that was historically placed at the join between the neck and the body of a vase or on the edge of a tunic. Bloomer also offers a neat encapsulation of major ornamental motifs by dividing the West, East and Mesoamerica into classificatory groups with the West using the lotus and vine; the East using the dragon and cloud; and Mesoamerica using the step and hook. The Islamic world, with its prohibition of figural shapes except in the depiction of paradise, utilizes only geometry. Bloomer portrays ornament as something that is ‘superadded to beauty or auxiliary to beauty. He uses the analogy of a house and explains the house is the object, the proportion and volume of the rooms should express the ‘beauty’ and the ornament is superadded to amplify this expression of beauty.5

Kent Bloomer’s explication offers an organization of ornament that is concerned with the historical identification or evolution of ornamental forms reminiscent of the system building theories of art historian Alois Riegl. It should be noted that Bloomer’s account lacks the study of origins in the manner of Riegl, who genuinely felt the presence of permanent visual qualities attached to ethnic cultural motifs.6 Bloomer’s positioning of ornament as a detail could also be viewed as directly descending from the ornamental pattern books whose illustrated pages ordered, visually recorded, and disseminated styles of ornament for the “architects, decorators,

handicraftsmen and all classes of art students”7 from the fifteenth until the nineteenth century. The intent, use and market for pattern books varied from region to region. A German publication from 1537 claims to have, “assembled an anthology of exotic and difficult details that should guide the artists who are burdened with wife and children and those who have not traveled. It should store stupid heads and inspire understanding artists to higher and more ingenious arts until art comes back to its rightful honour and we lead other nations”.8 A six volume Italian series from the same period expansively yet simply, “contains modern Renaissance as well as ancient architecture”.9 Nevertheless, even with an accommodation for regional variations, the overall approach to ornament found in pattern books places the question of ornament firmly within a taxonomic realm.

Art historian and archaeologist Oleg Grabar points to the danger of classification as being insidiously racist. He writes in The Mediation of Ornament that, “Typological and cultural definitions are, at first glance, innocuous enough, as nothing seems less threatening than ‘Mexican fret’ or ‘Persian faience scrollwork’. In fact, however, the perusal of plates in Speltz’s Styles of Ornament, not to speak of discussions by Ruskin, Viollet-le-Duc, Riegl, or Strzygowski, brings ornament an ideological content that is at times quite virulent. National (Persian) or cultural (Moorish or Islamic) names for ornamental designs are not simply indicative for classification purposes, they imply certain national or racial, occasionally cultural, judgments and values.”10 Graber touches upon ornament functioning as a medium of political display with the ability to convey philosophical or ideological messages. It is an acception of ornament deployed since Roman times that reached its height in the late 19th century.11 As Graber points out the classification of ornament speaks to a hierarchy of status regarding signs or symbols that by implication is inclusive of the people who use these symbols. Productively for my research the notion of classification clearly

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9 Ibid., 30.
establishes a link between patterns and peoples that positions the ornament in direct relation to the group.

To typify or classify something can be understood as a reduction of the operational field within which an item is considered to circulate. Although I agree with Grabar that it can lead to stereotyping, I will also argue that classification, in the fact that it deals with grammars, styles or dictionaries, establishes and maintains a decisive break between ‘things’ and their environments or in this case the object and its ornament. In a sense this work of ordering liberates ornament from the necessity of finite attendance. The two-dimensional reproduction of ornament situated on a printed page amongst other details similarly devoid of original context initiates a new form. Its primary situation is obliterated as its original partner is forgotten. Ornament is not only disassociated from its source but it is also evacuated of its past meaning. It is hollowed out; then drained of its signification. For a time it might harbor the ghost of a predetermined meaning as suggested by Riegl but eventually this intended sense loses direction and the only thing that can be delivered is a surface concomitantly articulate and indiscernible. What I propose is that as a result of this taxonomic action ornament becomes a shell of its former self. It acquires a new potential in a type of generative blankness that enables it to be reanimated or reused in or for another fashion. Instead of a concern with definitive readings, ornament now associates with multiplicities, intensities and feelings. It associates with detachments and attachments and detachments and attachments. I will suggest that what the users and the perceivers of ornament are left to experiment with is mood or style rather than message. I will return to this idea later in this essay.

A shift in the availability and use of ornament occurred during the middle of the nineteenth century. Influenced by a series of exhibitions beginning with the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, large handbooks or ‘grammars’ of ornament were published that explained the history and categorized styles of ornament. “Laid out on the page were a range of designs for borders, framing elements and individual motifs which could be used singly, or multiplied at will, to give fabrics, wallpapers, in fact any surface to which ornament could be applied, the essential look of ‘Greek’,
‘Roman’, ‘Gothic’ or, in the case of the British market, ‘Elizabethan’.”\textsuperscript{12} The pattern book had morphed from a simple black and white compendium of style intended for use by craftsmen, artists or architects into a large, luscious colour plated guide planted firmly in the hands of the newly minted and moneyed urban middle and working class free to experiment, even be self-expressive with those sources. Coupled with the increased supply of objects due to the mechanization of production, the sheer volume of objects carrying ornament increased dramatically.\textsuperscript{13}

The fact that ornament functions as an instrument that visually signals and maintains social position is accommodated by the notion of decorum. Sumptuary laws are an example of legislated decorum. The proliferation of ornament and the fact it was literally being mixed and matched legally and at will by the common folk points to a century that was in effect experiencing a loss of ancient decorum. The rules surrounding ornament were being broken. This also touches upon a key characteristic of ornament, which in fact operates between rules and invention. The nature of ornament is revealed not only as ordering but also, within disagreement or disregard for the rules, as creating disorder. It illustrates the notion that amateurs as well as professionals are capable if not entitled to devote energy to the ornamental task. It speaks to a societal agreement to be policed when it comes to the decorative. Far from being marginalized, these deep associations with order and surveillance illuminate ornament as a critical social concern.

The history of Western ornament reaches its dramatic apogee with ornaments’ banishment. The reasons for the expulsion of the decorative or the rejection of the elaborate must in reality contain an infinitely more complicated narrative then the story at hand. Nevertheless, the classic plot begins with general public hyper-enthusiasm for ornate surface modulation made available to the masses with the advent of mechanized production. This cacophony of pattern proved so physically overwhelming, so morally repellant that it induced the swift and sharp response of prescribed, systematic eradication. As James Trilling explains, “From time to time throughout history, individual styles, subjects and uses of art have been suppressed by religious or political movements, or even by radical shifts of fashion, but the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Snodin and Howard, \textit{Ornament: A Social History}, 67.
\item Ibid., 11.
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modernist polemic against ornament is qualitatively different from anything that preceded it. Never before had so fundamental an expression of creative spirit been singled out for elimination”. The expurgation is historically linked to Austrian architect Aolph Loos who, after spending three years in America, developed a great admiration for Louis Sullivan’s architectural style and his call, “to abandon ornament and concentrate entirely on the erection of buildings that were finely shaped and charming in their sobriety”. Loos returned to Vienna and in 1908 published his provocative manifesto “Ornament and Crime”.

Far from Sullivan’s well-mannered request for finely shaped and charmingly sober buildings, Loos’s tract featured language and imagery that was fantastically agitative if not downright diabolical; the attack squarely aimed at the human body and its closest objects – its coats and shoes, its food.

Loos continued his invective with, “A country’s culture can be assessed by the extent to which its lavatory walls are smeared”. Ostensibly this ‘smear’ refers to graffiti written on toilet walls but the immediate and overwhelming visual image conjured is of some sort of shit stained psychiatric ward or prison for the criminally insane, its ornament composed of deranged occupants and fecal wallpaper. Floating up and out of this highly personal and eccentric imagery is Loos’s clear, precise, almost scientific statement of discovery that: “The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects”.

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16. Ibid., 19.
17. Ibid., 19.
18. Ibid., 20.
It is now common practice to depict Loos and his tract as authorizing the ‘end’ of ornament. Snodin and Howard, authors of *Ornament: A Social History Since 1450* explain, “In the twentieth century…the argument was put forward that buildings do not need an artificially applied system of ornament at all and this led to the rejection of ornament by the Modern Movement, most famously articulated in the essay ‘Ornament and Crime’ by Adolph Loos”.¹⁹ Trilling’s version of the repudiation of ornament includes, “a general decline in decorative taste, with mass production as the main culprit; the doomed effort of concerned designers (mostly English, led by William Morris) to reverse the decline by introducing a less extravagant style of ornament that would satisfy the demands of modern life without the ‘soulless’ production techniques of industry; the pivotal role of the Austrian architect Adolph Loos, who in 1908 equated ornament with crime; and the growing recognition that the future belonged not to ornament but to industrial design”.²⁰ Alina Payne in *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism* identifies Loos as being seen as the principle voice of the crisis of ornament and Loos’s publication, although idiosyncratic in form, as representative of Vienna’s intellectual/architectural climate.²¹ Importantly she positions Loos as ‘being seen’ and the essay as an ‘item’ that accrued importance over time. She writes, “Whatever reaction it sparked at the time, this was far less than posterity would accord it. Translated and widely read over the next decades, eventually it acquired the power of an icon or a sign – modernism’s self proclamation in its most lucid and concise form”.²²

Alina Payne’s central hypothesis in *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism* addresses the shift from architectural ornamentation to the clean lines and unadorned surfaces of modernism. She questions whether, “the discursive space of reflection upon or about architecture disappeared altogether with the demise of ornament” or, and this is Payne’s contention, “had it been cut from its moorings and relocated in the objects that populated architecture’s spaces”? Payne indicates several explanations for the movement of ornament from architectural space to *Kleinarchitektur* or small object space. She positions the focus of attention on the

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¹⁹ Snodin and Howard, *Ornament a Social History*, 67.
²² Ibid., 1.
small object as the culmination of various phenomenon occurring in the Western world such as the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of the first real global economy which, “manifested in a spectacular display of objects at the Great Exhibitions that succeeded each other almost yearly in the great capitals of the world. These were paradigmatic sites for nineteenth century thought”. Payne points to the burgeoning disciplines of archaeology, anthropology and ethnography that developed interpretations of societies from materially evident objects and conceived of models of understanding cultural evolution, “which revolved overwhelmingly around the concept of style”. She places ornament and objects as their primary sites of investigation and states, “most importantly, they raised the object of everyday use to the level of diagnostic site for culture”. Payne also acknowledges popular publications on ornament and decorative style such as Owen Jones’s classic Grammar of Ornament as directing attention towards smaller, household objects.

Ornament has been a question and in question since the classical age with ornament being equated to triviality, superfluity, unimportance, immoderation and excessiveness at various points in history. “Ornament and Crime” provides further descent along the hierarchical pathway until ornament lands with a twentieth century thud: primitive, degenerative, immoral and diseased. With modernism ornament in a sense becomes ‘grouped’, not in the sense that it represents a classifiable style but in the sense that its very appearance (or disappearance) is read as evidence of group-type with those using it seen as a primitive out-group or a group of low status and those abstemious seen as belonging to the moral, modern, better, in-group. This ideation reflected in ornament and its conflated cohort including decoration and detail being historically collected together and gendered as feminine. In Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, Rosika Parker and Griselda Pollock suggest the division between fine art and decorative art occurred during the renaissance with the feminization of the decorative becoming entrenched by the eighteenth century.

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23 Ibid., 1
24 Ibid., 18
25 Ibid., 18
26 Ibid., 18-19
Naomi Schor’s *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* utilizes the ‘ornamental’ at one end of a continuum that continues through to the detail. Schor writes,

> To focus on the detail and more particularly on the *detail as negativity* is to become aware, as I have discovered, of its participation in a larger semantic network bounded on one side by the *ornamental*, with its traditional connotations of effeminacy and decadence, and on the other, by the *everyday*, whose “prosiness” is rooted in the domestic sphere of social life presided over by women. In other words, to focus on the place and function of the detail since the mid-eighteenth century is to become aware that the normative aesthetics elaborated and disseminated by the Academy and its members is not sexually neutral.28

*In The Trouble with Beauty*, Wendy Steiner notes that, “Throughout aesthetic history, women and ornament have functioned as analogues. Women wear ornaments (more consistently than men), and have been considered, for better or for worse, ornaments to society and the home. Ornaments epitomize the aesthetic; their primary function is to be beautiful in themselves and so to add beauty to the larger wholes in which they figure. Thus, the aesthetic symbolism of ornament involves a gesture of ‘pleasing’, an openness of appeal that is conventionally gendered feminine”.29

At this point I will not specifically address or expand upon the equation of ornament with immorality, luxury, excess, the feminine, irrationality, deception, artifice etc. except to note that these connotations persist in various permutations and have been discussed since classical times. I question whether a conflation of ornament with the ornate doesn’t drive some of these persistent associations but also acknowledge that the function of decorum (social order) historically associated with ornament makes the assignation of ornament or ornament usage to a marginalized group a successful method of marginalizing ornament and visa versa. Of course the reverse is just as true with sumptuary laws an example of powerful groups being articulated and valorized through their use of ornament. Instead this research will locate and focus on conceptualizations that push ornament towards the body. Presently these are: the notion of decorum that in general proposes and purposes ornament as a boundary for groups; the concept of knowledge sited in ornament as enacted through disciplines

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that deal with groups (archaeology, anthropology and ethnography); and with Loos’s attack of ornament as inseparable from the body.

Re-siting Ornament

This project began with the proposition that groups and ornament share similar characteristics and that perhaps if given the right set of circumstances or information groups could in fact be construed as a type of ornament. I set about researching ornament keeping in mind the particular anthropomorphic slant that I was looking for in an attempt to incorporate the grouped figure into an understanding of ornament. Ideas that moved ornament closer to the body were particularly helpful in fleshing out my original intuition. After many months of searching and sifting through different readings and expectations placed upon ornament I could position ornament as proximal to the body within notions of decorum, within disciplines that dealt with people as relational beings (to each other or to things) and through certain historical writings that imagined ornament and people together. Providentially I returned to a quiet comment in the work of Mihaela Criticos where she casually notes that in its traditional acceptation the notion of ornament has its genesis in language and the rhetorical arts.30

Classical rhetorical training taught speakers the skills and manner needed to deliver effective and persuasive speeches or arguments. The language employed was figurative, exaggerated and entertaining, often put to use on audiences in courtrooms and assemblies. Aristotle’s writings explain rhetoric (as opposed to dialectic, which proceeds from questioning and answering) as for the most part proceeding in continuous form. It must take into account its target audience and their intellectual resources and follow a non-argumentative persuasion. Persuasion in this instance understood to include the character of the speaker, the emotional state of the listener and the argument itself. The rhetorician is defined as someone who is always able to

see what is persuasive.\textsuperscript{31} As Cristof Rapp writes in “Aristotle’s Rhetoric”, “The systemic idea of Aristotle’s works on rhetoric is that it is not enough to have a supply of things to say (the so-called ‘thought’), the theorist of rhetoric must also inform us about the right way to say those things (the so-called ‘style’)”.\textsuperscript{32} Classical rhetoric finds its precursor in poetry and the emotive language used as a technique to add drama to theatrical works. Aristotle’s practical advice to playwrights suffering scenes of dramatic emptiness was “in slack passages elaborate your style”.\textsuperscript{33}

In \textit{De Oratore} Cicero’s fictional character Crassus declares,

\begin{quote}
Speech is like a river, branching out into little streams, yet issuing from the same source; and in whatever direction it goes, it is attended by the same equipment and adornment. But we are now laboring under the opinions not only of the crowd, but also of half educated people. They find it easier to deal with things they cannot grasp in their entirety, they split them apart and almost tear them to pieces, and they separate words from thoughts just like a body from its soul—which in both cases can only wreak destruction\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

This passage clearly deals with the separation of content from form as rhetoric moves from the Greek tradition to the Latin tradition. The polemic continues into the 18\textsuperscript{th} century with Hugh Blair advising in \textit{Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres} that,

\begin{quote}
Indeed, when the arts of speech and writing are mentioned, I am sensible that prejudices against them are apt to rise in the minds of many. A sort of art is immediately thought of, that is ostentatious and deceitful; the minute a trifling study of words alone; the pomp of expression; the studied fallacies of rhetoric; ornament substituted in the room of use… If the following lectures have any merit, it will consist in an endeavor to substitute the application of these principles in the place of artificial and scholastic rhetoric; in an endeavor to explode false ornament, to direct attention more towards substance than show,
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
to recommend good sense as the foundation of all good composition and simplicity as essential to all true ornaments.  

These few passages are taken from a substantial body of writing concerning rhetoric that spans centuries. The passages are chosen to illustrate an inheritance that follows ornament as it moves from its conception and nomination in language towards its appearance in visual and material realms. The split between form and content is clearly articulated in Aristotle’s writings with his clear distinction between thought and style. Classical Greek rhetoric however did not handle this division as two distinct activities but rather looked at style and content as forming a whole that was inseparable in its deployment. As rhetoric moved into the Latin tradition the split between form and content becomes a matter of contention with Crassus’ plea to leave these notions undivided, the plea clearly signaling the inevitable progression towards disunion between form and style. Also contained within this passage is the linking of morality and a separation of groups according to their use of language and its attendant adornments with the ‘half educated’ desirous of a split between words and thoughts. The Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres completes the split between content and form as well as promulgates the connection between morality and ornament. In this tract the use of ornament is discussed in terms of art, ostentation, deceit and artificiality. The instruction is concerned with good versus bad ornament and the utilization of true ornament over false. The apprehension of ornament as containing an inherent morality is a tradition that persists to this day with this attribute directly evidenced by these antique lectures.

So in effect two things happen during this trajectory, the first is a split between ornament and content and the second is an assignation of morality upon ornament, its use and its users. It is fun to note Crassus’ nomination of the ‘half-educated’ as the proponents of a split between content and form because we, who have experienced the ideologies of the 20th century, have not only accepted and operated under the notion that form and content are discreet concepts but also within a society where content is valorized and form is deemed subsidiary or unnecessary at best and denigrated, subsumed or banished at worst. The inversion brilliantly illustrates how a

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large part of apprehension, although it feels logical, essential or even natural is really just an activation of a veneer of induction and education that is predicated upon the prejudices and persuasions that form the tastes of our times.

The connection between rhetorical ornament and visual ornament opens up a productive avenue for research as it provides a direct link between the body and the deployment of ornament. It reinvests ornament with an understanding of performance and activation that is delivered through the body. It explicates ornament as both a verb and a noun. To reintroduce ornament by way of rhetoric also supports the idea of ornament as learned technique or a repertoire of techniques to be deployed upon an audience. Rhetorical ornament directly engages with the task of emotion and the persuasion of an audience through a performance that is delivered verbally. In this case ornament is not only close to the body, it is installed and deployed through the body. In a move to expand the notion of ornament, the research argues for a similar understanding to be awarded ornament that is deployed as a visual display. In this instance ornament will be understood as a technique of and for the relational body or in other words the group.

**Contemporary Ornament**

Despite negative or positive orientation, architecture has continually placed ornament at the forefront of its dialogue with the majority of writing concerned with ornament emanating from this discipline. The subtext of its banishment speaks volumes regarding ornament’s non-neutrality and its importance for this discipline. While grounded in an architectural discussion, these references are by no means restricted to it and apply to ornament in general. The late 20th and early 21st centuries have embraced a renewed interest in ornament with architecture leading this discussion once again. Although there are many different theories emanating from architecture with regard to ornament, two of the most significant are the notion that ornament is a producer of affect and the notion that ornament is a mediator. These concepts are referred to and built upon in a vast majority of publications that deal with ornament, décor and decoration. Farshid Moussavi and Michael Kubo’s 2006 publication *The Function of Ornament* is credited with the establishment of architectural ornament as
functioning through the transmission of affects and Oleg Grabar’s 1992 publication *The Mediation of Ornament* is acknowledged as envisioning an active mediating role for ornament. Please note this is contemporary ornament at its most concise and applicable to the needs of this research.

Farshid Moussavi identifies ornament as an instrument that allows architects to embed built forms with intelligence and creative possibilities. She proposes that rather than being viewed as symbolic and functioning through the representation of something else, architectural ornament should be viewed through its own actuality. She explains that it is not what built forms represent but how they function affectively that is critical for architecture to become connected to culture. She writes, “Ornament is the figure that emerges from the material substrate, the expression of embedded forces through processes of construction, assembly and growth. It is through ornament that material transmits affects. Ornament is therefore necessary and inseparable from the object. It is not a mask determined *a priori* to create specific meanings (as in Postmodernism), even though it does contribute to contingent or involuntary signification (a characteristic of all forms). It has no intention to decorate, and there is no hidden meaning. At best of times, ornament becomes an “empty sign” capable of generating an unlimited number of resonances. Whereas décor and representation promoted by Postmodernism correspond to a self-limiting movement from the possible to the real which cannot create anything new, ornament is in line with non-representational thought and the creative actualization of the virtual. Decoration is contingent and produces “communication” and resemblance. Ornament is necessary and produces affects and resonance”.

The majority of Moussavi’s approach to ornament does not differ radically from ideas that have been in circulation for at least a century and at most since ancient times. The first is the idea of ornament as a material substrate. This recognition has been in play since modernism and is in fact implemented throughout 20th century design. The use

36 Moussavi in particular develops the notion of affect directly from philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s work on affect.
38 Ibid., 819
of precious materials like onyx and marble specifically because of their surface opulence or the intentional retention of traces left by concrete formwork to make the viewer aware of the productive hand of the construction worker are examples of a neo-ornamental element that belongs to the vocabulary of 20\textsuperscript{th} century ornament.\textsuperscript{39}

Ornament understood as inseparable from its object relates back to the ancient Greek concepts. The contingency of décor or decoration juxtaposed with the necessity of ornament repeats a task of hierarchical positioning and exclusion reminiscent of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. That ornament becomes at best an empty sign is the result of situating ornament in a taxonomic realm and as \textit{The Function of Ornament} is actually a graphic guide, the classificatory process is completed by illustration. Moussavi’s publication is unquestionably a 21\textsuperscript{st} century pattern book. However, although she doesn’t venture very far from a traditional acceptance of ornament, the relationship Moussavi builds between ornament and affect does shift ornament away from passivity towards activation. She allows ornament an activity that can be understood as the pursuit of attachment through affection. Of critical importance to Moussavi is the connection of architecture to culture, society or in other words people; this bond accomplished through ornament.

With \textit{The Mediation of Ornament} Oleg Gragar promises to, “elaborate and to meditate on issues of the perception, utilization and fabrication of visually received forms… the visual order we shall be exploring is the loosely called ornament”.\textsuperscript{40} Importantly he makes no distinction between representational and non-representational images but rather states, “No category of design, no group of motifs escapes a kind of treatment that can be called ornamental or decorative”.\textsuperscript{41} Gragar proposes a theory of intermediaries in art and that ornament is itself or exhibits most forcefully as an intermediary order. This intermediary takes many forms, but all of them are characterized by one central feature: they are not, except in a few extreme cases, the work of art itself. Instead Gragar envisions ornament as a type of agent or mediator that is not logically necessary to the perception of a visual message but without which the process of understanding would be more difficult.\textsuperscript{42} He states, “The only certain

\textsuperscript{40} Oleg Gragar, \textit{The Mediation of Ornament}, xxii-5.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 45.
thing is that there must be an intermediate or a set of intermediates for any appreciation of a work of art, but the nature of these intermediaries is not fixed."43

Intermediaries can take the form of representational objects as well as items that have lost their relationship with physical reality. He writes, “They represent a category of relationship often overlooked in our tendency to binary opposites. It is a category of sensual pleasure… It is part of the nature of a work of visual art… Yet it is not a representation of something with an independent existence, even if it takes forms like leaves, flowers or arches that are part of an independent world of nature or of human constructs and constructions.”44 Grabar explains intermediaries can act as rhetorical devices for the presentation of other things or conversely as a sensory attraction (or repellence) built into the very existence of the artifact.45 He continues, “Its only peculiarity is that it is an attribute whose range can vary as widely as human emotions and feelings can be dissected and analyzed”.46 Grabar goes so far as to propose that, “good architecture is a true ornament… that is always meant as an invitation to behave in certain ways”.47

A form of inertia pervades most disciplinary thinking and popular opinion surrounding the topic of ornament. This simplification and lack of acknowledgement is perhaps testimony to the negligence awarded ornament during the 20th century through modernism. We are accustomed to seeing ornament as a product rather than as an activity. To mediate means to act as a go-between or be a connecting link between things, to be the medium for effecting, conveying or for communicating.48 It is in all senses an action; a doing word; a verb. By envisioning ornament as a mediator Grabar releases ornament from the dull duty of passive application and reveals it as an activating force. He playfully suggests with his comment regarding architecture that ornament acts as an invitation to behave in certain ways. With this remark the properties of ornament are linked directly to the human body. Ornament now has the capacity to transform and literally shape human behavior. Critically for

43 Ibid., 231.
44 Ibid., 234.
46 Ibid., 235.
the notion of ornament the change is procured by an invitation rather than a command, in keeping with Aristotle’s framing of rhetorical ornament as a persuasion as opposed to an argument. This is an important distinction for ornament that sets it apart from edicts or issuances that are mandated or enforced. Ornament preserves pleasure. Grabar’s designation reinvests ornament with its original metaphoric and transformational status and delivers it to an expansive field of possibilities, potentials and poetics. The treatment for ornament, its applications, perceptions and influence now inhabits a lively domain that includes both rhetorical and existential apprehension as well as representational and non-representational subjects.

Of significance to this research are the notions that intermediaries remain unfixed in nature and so are inherently unstable and that intermediaries are ‘doing’ things. However, Grabar’s theory of mediation rests disproportionately with the reception of these qualities as experienced by the viewer. In a point of departure, this project refocuses the lens of mediation towards the maker engaged with the utilization of ornament. The ornamentist, if you will. In this way not only is ornament accepted as an activity but is also illuminated as a practice. In an extension of Grabar’s concept of mediation, the project develops ornament as a series of explorations and techniques that through artistic management or handling mediate and modulate one item towards another. There is no hierarchy or subordination of one item over another rather the ornament inclusive of its ornamenting activity is imagined as negotiating an act of transfer across boundaries. These boundaries will encompass animate and inanimate entities and privilege concerns such as attachment, transformation and mood. The project takes a cue from David Brett who treats ornament and decoration as a ‘family of practices’ in his book *Rethinking Decoration*. Unlike Brett who devotes this practice to visual pleasure, I will expand my family to include not only pleasure but also affects or atmospheres that appreciate a more enigmatic resonance.

Finally I will refer to the work of Associate Professor of Architecture at Mincu University Bucharest Mihaela Criticos who attends to the recent re-engagement with ornament by advancing an elegant solution. She writes, “Although the significations, acceptations and functions of ornament are variable, the presence of certain constants

that can be traced in the evolution of ornament and within its innumerable avatars belongs to a hypothesis of the existence of a general ornamental dimension with a multiplicity of expressions, rather than a succession of different culturally-determined conceptions on ornament”. 50 Criticos goes on to explain that ornaments have four main functions that “remain available to any ornamental species, though in varying proportions”. 51 These functions are the symbolic or representational, the qualifying or adjectival, the ordering and the decorative. 52 She offers a twenty-first century expansion of ornament that critically includes the notion that “specific intention can turn almost everything into ornament”. 53 In keeping with Grabar, she moves ornament from a place of definition, classification or catalogue to a future space of generation, mediation and activity. Her determination animates ornament with an infinite flexibility that poetically refers to an ancient understanding of ornament as metamorphic, the expansion into the ‘dimensional’ paradoxically offering neat conceptual sites for new species.

Towards a Practical Ornament

The first chapter introduces ornament to the reader. It begins as a brief history lesson in effort to break down some of the prejudices and truncated understandings we have inherited from the Modernist polemic against ornament. I have attempted to show how a comprehension of ornament has evolved from ancient times to the present. I note that ornament has accrued multiple conceptions and point out that residues from these points of origin are often in operation in some fashion or another whenever ornament is deployed. In true ornamental fashion these ghosts and vestiges often present themselves at unscheduled times with unpredictable affects. I’ve looked to contemporary ornament and found a return to ancient notions of transformation and metamorphosis coupled with an expansion of the field of ornament to include basically any thing or subject given the intent and treatment of these things is ornamental. In working towards the establishment of a practical ornament that resists a populist simplification to pure geometries or kaleidoscopic patterns and grounds, I found a complex ornamental dimension. In order to define the borders of the subject,

50 Criticos, “The Ornamental Dimension,” 187-188.
51 Ibid.,193.
52 Ibid.,193-205.
53 Ibid.,188.
a few key understandings significant to the research are nominated. Number one is that ornament can be construed as a site for thought. Number two is that ornament can itself be the message. Number three is that ornament resides in the body when it comes to rhetoric, gesture, performance and decorum and is approximate to the body in the instance of adornment. Number four is that ornament is by nature unstable and enigmatic.

These ideas are just a few of the possible understandings that can be attributed to a notion of ornament. I have selected these to aid in the positioning of the group within the ornamental dimension. Although Grabar and Criticos both extend ornament to include human figures and claim that any ‘thing’ can be construed as ornament given the application of an ornamental treatment, I need to explore and address this suggestion as integral to arts practice as well as discuss its outcomes. The original suspicion was that groups and ornament share certain characteristics and this notion will be expanded upon in the next chapter with the discussion turning towards the group. Utilizing a contemporary view of ornament as intent, the group could be rendered ornament by simply applying an ornamental treatment to it. This would necessitate leaving ornament within the decorative dimension and accepting the simple application of a geometric pattern or tessellation applied to the surface of my group as sufficient to manifest the group as ornament. However, I would like to move to a more complicated realm, one where the group-ornament-display delivers an expanded conception of ornament that shifts beyond object-ness into activity.

Ornament now becomes my site for thinking the group itself, in the sense that the group has always been ‘thought’ through ornament. Ornament is a method of presenting groups that spans ancient and contemporary times. It is in this way that ornament becomes an activity and a technique of activating the perception of groups. Maybe the group doesn’t look like the traditional acceptance of ornament but it does act like and through ornament. The visual activity activates feelings, sensations, values and moralities but in this case they reside in a lighter mode characterized by generativity, ambiguity and enigma as opposed to the facets of ornament that include laws, regulation, ideology and monumentality. I’m reaching for the expression of a subjectivity that forms the group but does not inform the group. Rather than just a pleasing pattern this ornament indicates the activity of transference accomplished by
ornament to present or picture the group form but avoids infilling this image with content. This allows ornament to operate with a type of momentum that permeates the separation between thinking and a family of practices that includes an adornment or an equipment of surface. I will nominate this space as the specific territory of the group-ornament that the research is concerned with establishing.
PART TWO: (In that Life is a Matter of) Taking Form

Motif

The first definition of motif refers to a decorative image or design, especially a repeated one forming a pattern. The second defines a dominant or recurring idea in an artistic work.¹ I have approached this project by juggling a number of dual motifs. The first duality is the integral relation in art between the theoretical and the artwork. The second duality is the conceptual framework that calls upon two distinct concepts, ornament and group. Both concepts possess their own diverse histories, necessitating the development of suitably concise working definitions in order to manage two very large arenas. I found visually imagining the entire process to be a type of ornamental motif was helpful. In a sense this is a metaphorical replication of a pattern and ground effect. The group comes to the fore as the idea of ornament recedes to the background and conversely the ornament and its characteristics overwhelm the notion of the group and take primacy. It is this push/pull movement that I am concerned with in the overall apprehension of both visual and written works. Much like pattern and ground I hope to infuse a balance between the group and the ornament that is not only horizontal in nature but also an extrusion of ideas and shapes into space, a dimensional amplification and then a quieting (from foreground to background, from background to fore). As the first part of this essay established a workable framework for ornament, so the second part will develop a similar structure for the group.

Entitativity

Donald T. Campbell crafted the term entitativity in 1958 to describe the perception of social groupings as having ‘real existence’ and the degree to which a group is perceived or evaluated as being an entity. Campbell writes, “Social groups as entities do not have an epistemological status different from such middle-sized entities as stones and rats, but are apt to be fuzzier, less discrete, less multiply confirmed, and in

Campbell’s search for a set of empirical determinants in the evaluation of group entitativity was in response to Herbert Spencer’s *Principles of Sociology, Part II, The Inductions of Sociology* and Stuart Rice’s *Quantitative Methods in Politics*. Spencer was concerned with the organization of social groups and their potential to be understood using the parameters of biological systems organization. Rice pursued a statistical view of the perceptual world and explored the potential for data to generate belief in the existence of group relationships. Campbell reasoned that before a group could be considered as analogous to a biological system, it should first be identified as a system, or more specifically, as an entity. He borrowed Rice’s question *when is an aggregate of persons an entity* and developed it into the more active problem of *how do we perceive entities or degrees of entitativity in groups?*

Campbell proposed, “That we look to the empirical clues of entity used in the visual perception of middle-sized physical entities and then employ these clues in the analysis of social aggregates as entities”. His solution to finding groups ‘provable’ was to extend Gestalt theorist Max Wertheimer’s principles of perceptual organization from ‘things’ to people. Wertheimer first posed the problem of perceptual grouping in 1928 by asking what stimulus factors influence the perceived grouping of discreet elements. The results of Wertheimer’s study are the Gestalt laws or principles of grouping with the classical principals being *proximity, similarity, common fate, good continuation, closure, symmetry* and *parallelism*. Campbell applied the principles of *common fate, similarity, proximity* and *Pragnanz* (which literally means pithiness in German) to his investigation of the perception of group entitativity. *Proximity* relates to an understanding that elements close together are more likely to be perceived as parts of the same organization. *Similarity* purports that similar elements are more likely to be perceived as parts of the same organization. *Common fate* proposes that elements that move together in the same direction, and

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3 Ibid.,16.
4 Campbell, “Common Fate,” 17.
otherwise in successive temporal observations share a common fate are more likely to be perceived as parts of the same organization. Pragnanz (good continuation or good figure) suggests that elements forming a part of a spatial organization or pattern, as a line or more complex form, tend to be perceived as a part of the same unit.

Campbell tested each of these four principles and ranked them according to their success at evoking the perception of a group as entitative. He found common fate to be the most indicative of entitativity followed by similarity and then proximity. No further mention was made of Pragnanz although he clearly referenced this principle as one he would be considering. Interestingly he touched upon the idea that proximity may not be essential for modern social groups, stating for example, “that the FBI may be a group with sharper boundaries, a harder, more solid social entity than is Davenport County, Iowa”, 6 foreshadowing the advent of an area of sociological specialization now known as the social network. Campbell’s work with group entitativity ends with a non-sequiturial plea for “the behavioral scientist to certainly allow himself an applied epistemology which makes use of the achievements of the more advanced sciences rather than limiting himself to what can be deductively justified on the basis of the contemplations of a mortal philosopher, sitting immobile with both eyes closed, his mind swept clean by intent at least of the biasing effects of prior learning”. 7 Perhaps underneath Campbell’s ambition to evaluate the group as an entity using deterministic coordinates is the correlative desire for the legitimization of sociology as a discipline in possession of its own ‘real’ object, scientific or science-like methods and contiguous conceptual boundaries. A picture of what a sociologist might do or act like in the self-organization of being or becoming sociologist(s) also emerges.

The concept of entitativity has expanded considerably since it was first proposed more than four decades ago but virtually all contemporary research on entitativity can be traced to the seminal work of Campbell. 8 Researchers interested in entitativity examine not only the extent to which a social aggregate is or is not perceived as a

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6 Campbell, “Common Fate,” 22.
7 Ibid., 24.
coherent, unified and meaningful entity, but also the role of entitativity in information processing, social perception and behaviour.\(^9\) This project proposes that the variable antecedents of entitativity such as common fate, similarity, proximity and pragnanz, that allow a viewer to perceive a group as cohesive ‘in real life’, are the same principles the viewer brings to the perception of groups of figures in visual art and are also the means by which visual art ascertains its group. This concept of entitativity differs from the sociological application in that it does not view the Gestalt principles as ‘given’ or prior data but rather understands these to be the artistic/visual instruments that generate an image (which for all intents and purposes simply contains figures) and propels or manipulates it towards an understanding of that representation to be one of a group, collective or figures with some type of shared reality.

**Group**

To subjectively belong to a group or identify as a member of a group could be considered to be an unremarkable characteristic of being human. Humans are after all small group animals typified by a need for intimacy and to be with others. To objectively identify something as a group and make decisions about it is an activity we participate in on a daily basis and yet there is no standard definition for a group. Our understanding of ‘the group’ ranges from the familiarity of families to the anonymity of passengers clustered at a bus stop. Collectivities such as families, tribes and clans have been long recognized but it wasn’t until the last decade of the nineteenth century that groups began to be scientifically studied and theories began to be devised concerned with thinking about the group. Sociologists have various ways of classifying groups in terms of their purpose and structure, the most usual being the distinction between primary groups (close face to face contact) and secondary groups (members are rarely if ever in direct contact). Groups are often considered to be either planned or emergent. Planned groups are specifically formed for some purpose and emergent groups come into being relatively spontaneously.\(^10\)

\(^9\) Ibid., 142.
In *The Group and the Unconscious*, French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu writes, “No equivalent for ‘small group’ existed in the ancient languages, which amounts to saying that the concept did not exist. There was only the individual on the one hand and society on the other”.11 Indo-European linguist Carl Darling Buck states, “instead of any generic term, there is a wealth of individualistic terms differentiated according to the object referred to”.12 For example in English the word *band* was used to specify armed men, robbers or musicians and the word *bevy* indicated girls or certain types of birds. *Cluster* referred to flowers, stars and people.13 Hannah Chapelle Wojciehowski writes in her book *Group Identity in the Renaissance World* that, “The emergent concept of the group must be distinguished from words for *crowd* or *multitude*, which are abundant in linguistic history. In the Indo-European languages, such words often derive from terms meaning *much* or *many*. Frequently they carry a negative connotation by also denoting *turmoil* or *disorder*. Many words for *crowd* derive from verbs signifying *to press*, because they indicate a closely packed number of persons… Separate from this host of words used to denote the concept of the crowd emerged a new word as a generic term for collectives, *gruppo*”.14

The origin of the word group has its roots in the Italian word *gruppo*, which is derived from the earlier word for knot, *groppo*.15 Historically knots were not only used as attachment devices but also to record information, signify spirituality or communicate spiritual knowledge and provide aesthetic enjoyment. Actual knots or two-dimensional images of knots were often added to the surface of another object for aesthetic or spiritual purposes. Metaphoric variations on the theme of the knot include interlace, attachment and enigma, therefore using the theme of a knot as a metaphor for the description of a small, orderly, undifferentiated assembly offers many variable understandings of this ‘body’. The first being the idea of the knot/group posed as a question or puzzle, a united conundrum to be solved by unpicking or unpacking. The

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13 Ibid., 930-931.
15 Ibid., 48-49.
second being the thought that the knot/group is an item that is only momentarily cohesive, an entity that actually has the potential to come undone or in fact whose very purpose is to join with a subsequent view to release. A knot can also be understood in terms of a snarl or a tangle as in knotted hair or knotted thread. The knot becomes spontaneous and undesirable like a snare or a net, something that catches or stops action. It has the capacity to be unwound or reversed usually with a modicum of patience or cunning. Knots are also used in witchcraft to cast spells. An example is the knot magic of the traditional *nine-knot spell* used to bind positive or negative influences to other things according to the users desire.

The metaphorical variations on *groppo/gruppo* continued throughout sixteenth century Italy. The word could be used to refer to the complications before the denouement in dramatic plots, as well as animate or inanimate collections such as Galileo’s discussion of a “*gruppo delle macchie solari*” (a group of sun spots). It would assume additional connotations within the context of the musical and visual arts and could designate a musical trill or ornament as well as a *cluster of figures in a sculpture or painting*.  

Wojciechowski ties the Renaissance conception of the group as a cluster of figures in a sculpture or painting, at least in part, to the discovery of a large statue of apparently ancient origin that was found in a subterranean chamber buried beneath a vineyard on the outskirts of Rome. She writes, “From that hidden space they excavated the *Laocoon*, a long lost masterpiece of classical statuary that had been walled up for centuries in the baths of the Roman Emperor Titus… The statue depicts Laocoon, a Trojan priest of Neptune, flanked on either side by his two young sons. All three are trapped in a lethal tangle of enormous biting snakes.” The object caused a profound impact on the artistic and intellectual microclimates of Renaissance Rome and Florence. It was the first artifact unearthed during the Renaissance that could be identified by a Roman textual source, providing a direct link from the

16 Ibid., 52.
17 Ibid., 36.
18 Ibid., 38.
19 Ibid., 37.
ancient world to a Renaissance mad with the collective aspiration to revive, reanimate and re-embody the classical past.\textsuperscript{21}

The delivery of Laocoon and his sons from their earthen incubation precipitated “the group, both word and concept, to become a work of art: that is, to become an aesthetic representation of persons or objects in a composition… A group differs from a crowd, a throng, or even a multitude. By virtue of the intentional relation of its component figures, especially in the artistic context, a gruppo is by its nature more controlled, more composed, smaller, and more arranged than many of the previous concepts of the collective.”\textsuperscript{22} During the late Renaissance and Baroque eras, the word gruppo in its artistic and compositional sense began to pass into other European languages and by the end of the seventeenth century the word appears in English for the first time, again signifying figures or objects organized in an artistic composition.\textsuperscript{23}

The Laocoon operates within the terms of Campbell’s 20\textsuperscript{th} century theory of entitativity. When unearthed, this father-son-snake manifestation galvanized the nascent concept and word for group because it functioned as an object whose degree of cohesion was clearly articulated by its composition. The four Gestalt principles pertinent to the perception of entitativity are present in this work including the proximal situation of Laocoon to his sons, their similarity of gesture and appearance, the understanding of these characters to be experiencing a common fate and the Pragnanz or form of these characters to appear as a simple yet unified whole. Originally cited as carved out of a single piece of stone, the statue presented a conundrum to Renaissance viewers as the artistry needed to accomplish this feat required spectacular levels of craftsmanship. It was later discerned that the stone was in fact several separate stones artfully jointed together by multiple makers.\textsuperscript{24} So the Laocoon as an entitative group is not only invoked by its visual representation of individuals collected together to form an entity but also reiterated by the facts of its materiality and construction. The pieces are joined together and appear as a whole through technique rather than actuality. The Laocoon functions as an example of a

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 52-53.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 58.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 61.
\end{flushleft}
collection of figures whose form appears entitative because of artistic manipulation. This ‘togetherness’ coupled with the foreign atmospheres of ancient times was registered by the Renaissance viewer and prompted the initiation of the word *gruppo*.

If we accept Wojciehowski’s hypothesis that the discovery of the *Laocoon* initiated a new word for a collection of figures, then this word points to the development of a new consciousness regarding an encounter with form. In this case it is a single form that includes multiple figures and so is particularly useful as an example of an entitative group for this project. But in general the need for a term like ‘group’ accentuates a shift from forms whose attributes are known and specified to forms that are unknown and specified as such. The words cluster or bevy arrive at specific destinations and belong to particular associations and therefore a type of known form. A general name for the incidence of ‘things’ collected together without direction or specific purpose didn’t exist until the Renaissance.\(^{25}\) Perhaps this is a reflection of the expanding boundaries that were being experienced by the people of the Renaissance world. As views turned outward towards geographies and peoples whose forms were unknown; words were developed to accommodate this state of unknowing. The *Laocoon* is in fact a small band of travellers from an ancient land, an unexpected arrival whose mysterious appearance breaches as well as mediates time and place. This lends the group an enigmatic quality that differentiates it from earlier conceptions of figures collected together. This property of un-knowingness native to the original notion of the group promotes an indeterminate form as a primary characteristic of the group. Indeterminate form is also a characteristic of ornament and as such points to an entry point for the group to be understood as a type of ornament.

Wojciehowski’s argues in *Group Identity in the Renaissance World* that although the Renaissance is foundationally represented as an era historically animated and valorized by ideas of individualism and subjectivism, that in fact this period should also be examined with reference to the idea of collectivity and groups.\(^{26}\) She states,


\(^{26}\) Wojciehowski is not the first to propose this theory. “Bruckhardt’s story, like many great imaginative works, still attracts new audiences and new responses. His hypothesis concerning Renaissance individualism remains foundational in many
“If we accept, however provisionally, that a fundamental shift in consciousness took place at the end of the Middle Ages – a shift tied to the so-called rise of the individual in Italy – then it is reasonable to surmise that a shift in group consciousness must also have taken place”. Wojciehowski opens her book with a chapter discussing the *Laocoon* in terms of its being a material entity or physical representation of an emergent condition (*gruppo*) and explains how the unearthing of this object consolidates a new concept and word which explicates a new circumstance of being, that of being together in a group.

She writes,

> The compositional arrangement of individual components that constitute a group implies a certain intentionality behind the spatial arrangement of figures – especially that of the artist. This concept was not built into earlier notions of the collective, such as the tribe, the family, the throng or the horde. In fact, it can be said to emerge in the new notion of the group in the Italian Renaissance. As a concept, the *gruppo* was no longer associated primarily with accidental knots, tangles, and snarls but with deliberately constructed dramatic plots, musical motifs, and artful arrangements of figures in space. People like words, notes, and objects could be rearranged, shaped, and combined artistically. Such intentional combinations also imply a certain freedom of action or license – artistic or otherwise. Overtime, this notion of intentionality within the group as a work of art would assume its full social dimension, alongside other less premeditated or freely chosen relationship possibilities among humans.

So in essence the ‘group’ positions the figure or the body as belonging to a world of things. By extending the world of things to the social world, especially if using the word people to indicate figure, the group begins to speak to the very modern idea of behaving or being in a certain manner and amongst a certain milieu that is chosen rather than destined. (Campbell’s concept of entitativity is an example of extending the world of things to the social world.) It articulates the acquisition of a veneer, an artificiality or modulation of positioning or surface. The space of the body, the figure, the human or more precisely the human collected together is imagined and imaged as intentionally produced. Less primal than a tribe or family and less urgent than a throng or horde, the group is a creation, a play, a construction. Wojciehowski dismisses the notion of snarls or tangles with this fresh collective but I would suggest ways, despite the fact that it has often been challenged by historians and cultural critics.” (Wojciehowski, p. 2)

28 Ibid., 71.
that the group as a concept has retained its association with unpredictability and complication and that this understanding persists to this day. I would argue that the ambiguous nature of the group, its potential to be or become a problem, continues as a primary association with the word. The evidence lies with people’s continuing alertness and ability to make snap judgments about the ‘group-ness’ of groups and the fact that the ability to ascertain entitativity with alacrity is probably a key criteria of survival in the natural (and unnatural) world.

The apprehension of the group as a positive or negative entity is a cultural construct and a learnt behaviour. For example Sudanese migrants to Australia experience great difficulty with the police due to different cultural orientations regarding the group and the individual. In the Sudan a person walking alone is viewed with great suspicion as someone who is up to no good, an agent who is without group consensus present and available to shut down anti-social behaviours. The Sudanese collect and walk together to appear polite and peaceful. However in the Western world a gathering of people moving en masse, especially young men, is viewed with far greater suspicion than a solo character operating as an individual. This misinterpretation of cultural signals highlights the constructed nature of the perception of groups and also points to a Western distrust of the group with its original message of tangle or snarl remaining intact. I suggest that the distrust of the group could also be construed as emanating from the original appearance of the word group within the world of art and that this link with the art-world directly ties the group to a world of illusion and artifice, so the nature of group business is one of appearing to be rather than actually being. Much like the performances of classical rhetoric studded throughout with ornament, the group is a persuasion constituted through an ornamental method and ideas of artificiality, deception and trickery continue to linger with this association.

In Campbell’s construction of entitativity, the group is gauged as entitative from the position of an external viewer. In sociological terms this position is understood as the ‘out-group’ position meaning the perception is that of someone who is not a member of the group. The majority of recent research has maintained this position and has used the concept of entitativity as a theoretical umbrella for the understanding of a
series of phenomena in stereotyping and impression formation.29 Psychologist Emanuele Castano (one of the only researchers investigating entitativity from the position of the in-group that I have found) suggests that the concept of entitativity from the perspective of the in-group has a terrestrial and a celestial value. “Terrestrial, inasmuch as in-group entitativity enhances the perception of the in-group as an agent that can guarantee security to its members; celestial, because social identification with entitative in-groups may help individuals projecting themselves in space and time, beyond the confines of their necessarily finite personal existence.”30 Both values can be understood to operate in the picturing of a group, the terrestrial value provided by the image evidencing and reinforcing the fact that the figures contained within share some sort of commonality or similarity, the security of an allegiance ratified by the existence of the image. The image as well securing the realness/availability of its occupants, a visual statement of looking and being (together), a reference for both in-group (participant) and out-group (viewer). And celestial because the image makes this information not only able to be projected through space and time but also makes it materially available through space and time for both participants and viewers.

By assigning the words terrestrial and celestial to his proposed values, Castano permits the entitative surface to be conceptualized as a veil-like, filmy outer covering that is able to be detached, elevated (celestial) or lowered (terrestrial). These words also make an associative connection to a world of stars, territories and projections, a floating world of dreams. Sigmund Freud investigated the underlying structures of dreams, seeking to locate within them a hidden logic governing our lives in his book The Interpretation of Dreams (1900). He proposed that dreams position elements in ways that seem random or strange but that these things in fact go together for a reason. Freud uses the analogy of two frescoes painted by Raphael, The School of Athens which depicts the great philosophers of classical antiquity in conversation with each other and Mount Parnassus which envisions a gathering of poets both ancient and contemporary to highlight his idea of Gleichzeitigkeit or the simultaneity in dreams. Both frescoes envisage meetings that transcend space and time. Freud

30 Ibid., 382.
suggested the dreamer like the artist combines diverse memories and experiences in a narrative that at first appears arbitrary but on deeper examination is guided by intentionality. With this dream work Freud inadvertently highlights an idea of the collective that locates it within virtuality and fantasy.31

During the 1970s and 80s French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu developed the theory that the group although imagined or spoken of in terms of a body did not in actuality have a body and that in fact the group represented a primary threat to the individual resulting in the individual experiencing a bodily fragmentation when in a group situation.32 Didier excludes groups formed in family life or love-type groups because he reasons the ego is protected even idolized in such situations but I strongly disagree with this exclusion and would argue that family/love situations have extreme potential to not only fragment but obliterate the ego because of the sheer force of the love connection that has equal (if not catastrophic) force when activated along a negative trajectory. Anzieu writes, “Against so many I run the risk of no longer existing myself, of losing all meaning by being torn by so many different demands; ego shattered; mirror broken into pieces…it summons up the oldest of phantasies, that of dismemberment… Each person has his share in producing the image of the body dismembered, is frightened by it and seeks to run away from it. The group exists as such only when it can dispel this image by going beyond it. This is the first work (the aufheben),33 in the dialectical sense, which the group does on itself”.34 Didier explains although metaphorically conceptualized as a single body, “what tends to dominate in the psychic organization of the group tends to be not so much the centre, the nucleus, but rather the enveloping ‘ego skin’ which guarantees its unity, its continuity, its integrity, the differentiation between inside and outside, in which one finds areas of selective exchanges, implications and things forgotten”.35

Didier’s envelop and Castano’s celestial and terrestrial values refer to the group’s creation/perception of an outer layer (boundary) as a way to promote security for

31 Wojciehowski, Group Identity in the Renaissance World, xix-xxix.
32 Didier Anzieu, Group and the Unconscious, 120-121.
33 An English translation of aufheben includes the idea of lifting up and abolishing at the same time. Sublation is its closest English counterpart. It is a change with a preservation of qualities and contradictions.
34 Anzieu, Group and the Unconscious, 122.
group members. Didier’s security is necessary to counteract individual primary fears of dismemberment and Castano’s security emanates from the more pragmatic notion of safety in numbers. Freud shifts the group away from reality and into a dream space, constructing a type of surface vision and narrative for the gathering, now not only filmy but filmic. One example of the convergence of the celestial, terrestrial and dream space can be found in Benedict Anderson’s book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread Of Nationalism* (1983). With *Imagined Communities* Anderson suggests a “reorientation of perspective” regarding nationalism and brings to the fore an understanding of nationalism or nation-ness as a “cultural artifact”.36 He writes, “I will be trying to argue that the creation of these artifacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was the spontaneous distillation of a complex ‘crossing’ of discrete historical forces; but that once created, they became ‘modular’, capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations.”37 Anderson hypothesizes that the cultural roots of nationalism can be aligned with the work of religion and that the de-secularized intellectual space of the enlightenment necessitated a new response to the contingencies of *being* that continued to offer an apprehension of immortality, connectedness and cosmic continuity.38

Anderson redirects the notion of nationalism away from ideology and treats it as belonging within anthropological or universal domains such as kinship and religion. He puts forward a sophisticated view of nationalism that privileges community/collectivity as imaginary and proposes that, “in fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined”.39 Anderson explores the processes that create these ‘national communities’ but this project concerns itself with Anderson’s definition of nationalism as a cultural artifact, the words themselves alluding to group imaginings as a type of material thing, a manner, garment, image, narrative, fiction, whatever, that can be applied to the surface of figures to create ‘group-things’. The seeds of Benedict Anderson’s

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37 Ibid., 4.
38 Ibid., 10-11.
39 Ibid., 6
imagined communities are sown with the Renaissance concept of the group as an artful (generic, fungible) arrangement of choice, fiction and fantasy rather than inherited or predetermined forces. As Anderson states, “communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined”.40 This is Didier’s envelope, freed from its bloody, primordial task of dismemberment and reassembly, refashioned as a lighter, more playful, urbane aufheben.

Mass Ornament

During the early 20th century ornament gains a new form of expression. Siegfried Kracauer’s famous analysis of the ‘mass ornament’ links the formal arrangement of anonymous bodies found in the popular entertainment of the times to the impersonal geometries of abstract ornament. Kracauer primarily locates this mass ornament in the cinematic forms of the Tiller Girls, antique Busby Berkley type effects of massed female dancers. He points to the ornamental patterns produced by these multiplicities of dancers as “the aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires”.41 This ornament in effect shaped by large numbers of figures reproducing the mechanical actions of the production line through collective movement. The technologies of the 20th century assembly line reproduced outside of the factory and installed within popular entertainment. Kracauer’s connection between a collection of massed bodies and the ornament was inspired by the anonymities and loss of individualities suffered due to the technologies of the modern age. He views it as a material expression of the particularities of the historical conditions experienced due to capitalism.

Kracauer directs his concentration to the quotidian, the films and sporting activities accessed as entertainment by the majority of the population and reconfigures these items as objects for philosophical and social analysis. He writes, “We must rid ourselves of the delusion that it is the major events which have the most decisive influence on us. We are much more deeply and continuously influenced by the tiny

40 Ibid., 6
catastrophes that make up daily life”.\textsuperscript{42} It is within the cinema and sporting fields that Kracauer finds his object. Their surfaces are explored as new sites and forms of expression. Thomas Levin explains in the introduction to \textit{The Mass Ornament Weimar Essays} that, “In both, production becomes the work of an anonymous mass whose individual members each perform specialized tasks; but these tasks take on meaning only within the abstract, rationalized totality that transcends the individuals”.\textsuperscript{43} Kracauer raises many ambivalences with this essay as he views the surface of the mass ornament as a portal through to pure reason, as a relapse into mythology, as well as a sign of the capitalist system.

Not only does he relate the mass ornament to the body by pointing out its movements as mimicries of the efficiencies of the production line. He also invokes the popular practice of physical culture as an example of the mass ornament. Using an explanation of the role it plays in social life he connects the mass ornament to body culture and physical training in general. Kracauer writes, “The unlimited importance ascribed to the physical cannot be derived from the limited value it deserves. Such importance can be explained only by the alliance that organized physical education maintains with the establishment, in some cases unbeknownst to its front-line supporters. Physical training expropriates people’s energy, while the production and mindless consumption of ornamental patterns divert them from the imperative to change the reigning order… The social meaning is equivalent to that of the Roman \textit{circus games}, which were sponsored by those in power”.\textsuperscript{44} Although Kracauer views these physical activities as of limited value and with a polemically sinister underpinning to their rationale, this passage provides an important link. Because now the ornament initially comprised as an impossible systematized body-network of perfect specimens of whole or partial figures, becomes an attainable proposition for the ordinary body. It is the body viewed as concerned with the process of perfecting itself through practice, training, conditioning or technique. Perhaps it is a human sort of mitigated perfection or maybe the ‘perfectioning’ fails to initiate and the very practice itself remains as daydream or desire. Whatever the case may be, it is a type of

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 5.  
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.,17- 18.  
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 85.
activity we all understand. With this analysis Kracauer has named a body in possession of a technique or practice, as ornament.

Kracauer’s mass ornament exposes a stratified society comprised of the workers and those in power. It conflates production and diversion in an adjustment/arrangement that perfectly encapsulates capitalism, with its products understood as both the manufacture and consumption of mass distraction. The result is a representation of a workforce rather than a series of individuals working. The surface is illuminated as an image of loss. Conversely, this same industrial labour pictured through the lens of machine culture, Soviet style, becomes an expression of an image for the future. An expression, as Susan Buck Morss points out, “that even in its brutality could be seen to posses a utopian quality”. She comments upon the allure this form held for artists of the Soviet Union and states, “Only in this dreamlike context could poetry and production techniques converge so irresistibly, attracting dramatists, cinematographers and choreographers as artists of the human body”. This shifting context is in fact the realm of ornament, its surface phenomenon persuasive of a dream world of utopia or catastrophe depending upon the circumstances of its attachment, whether to institutional state or private power. In both cases the cohesive social body is literally formed and represented as entitative through ornamental manipulations.

Susan Buck-Morss writes in her essay “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay Reconsidered” that, “In the “great mirror” of technology, the image that returns is displaced, reflected onto a different plane, where one sees oneself as a physical body divorced from sensory vulnerability—a statistical body, the behavior of which can be calculated; a performing body, actions of which can be measured up against the “norm”; a virtual body, one that can endure the shocks of modernity with out pain.” The ‘shocks of modernity’ referring to Benjamin’s co-opting of the Freudian insight that consciousness is a type of shield protecting the organism against stimuli or excessive energies. Freud was concerned with the trauma

46 Ibid.,107.
of shell shock but Benjamin claimed this battlefield shock to be the normal state of modern life. Buck-Morss returns the idea of aesthetics to its original domain of the body as opposed to a work of art and develops the thesis that anaesthesia is a way of dealing with a body that no longer must suffer pain. She reframes the mass ornament as a phantasmagoria, a type of non-narcotic technique of anaesthetics. She writes, “Surface pattern, as an abstract representation of reason, coherence and order, became the dominant form of depicting the social body… The aesthetics of the surface in these images gives back to the observer a reassuring perception of the rationality of the whole social body… that pleases as an aesthetics of the surface, a de-individualized, formal and regular pattern”. Buck-Morss is referring to the Soviet contextualization of the mass ornament but Kracauer too correlates the mass ornament with a distraction whose purpose is the relief from crisis.

The ornament/phantasmagoria as a form of analgesia can be seen in the musical productions of the 1930’s, utilized as mass distraction from the privations of the great depression. Comfort or menace, it forms in the marching bands and drill teams of armies and educational institutions. From the black and white film stock of the Nuremburg rallies to the televised displays of North Korea’s colour infused parades of power, the massed human figure choreographed into abstract surface pattern projects itself insistently through modern times. Thomas Levin writes in the introduction to the Weimar Essays that, “In Kracauer’s earlier work the surface was a locus of loss, the hallmark of a world lacking the meaning which alone could give it substance”. Later this same surface domain, “though still a site of lack, suddenly acquires new meaning… a sur-face subject to a variety of physiognomic readings”. This is where ornament for the very fact of its lack, continues as site of multiple expressions. Regardless of its capitalist or socialist narrative destination, the mass ornament accomplishes an abstraction that essentially favours the representation of reason, coherence and order for its society. This is a picture of decorum; the cosmos ordered and policed by consuming patterns that leave the viewer without room for a worry or a thought.

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48 Ibid., 16.
49 Ibid., 33.
50 Ibid., 19.
51 Ibid., 20.
The conception of ornament as an ordering device is undeniable. It expresses itself in the very origins of the word. The Latin word for ornament, *ornamentum*, shares an etymological origin with the verb *ordino*, which means to organize. The words cosmos and cosmetics both derive from the Greek verb *kosmein*, which means to adorn and to arrange.\(^{52}\) The legacy of the modernist ban against ornament has led to an impoverished understanding of its operations. Coupled with the recognition of a 20\(^{th}\) century mass ornament, predicated upon an ordered and geometric appearance, results in the conceptual restriction of ornament to the expression of texture, pattern or topology. Today, under the influence of digital tools, the development of ornament often lies in the superficial texturing and ‘wallpaperisation’\(^{53}\) of surfaces. Pattern that used to play a relatively minor role in the Western ornamental tradition, contrary to the Islamic one, now appears as one of the most common forms taken by ornament in contemporary projects. However, older applications of ornament seldom covered the entirety of objects but were usually concentrated upon certain key points. Overabundance jeopardized one of the fundamental roles of ornament, which was to reinforce rhythm rather than spreading a profuse decorative layer over objects. Rather than a pervasive condition, ornament was conceived as a discreet series of embellishments.\(^{54}\) That pattern is understood as only one method in the panoply of techniques that can be configured as emanating from the family or genus of ornament is critical to a 21\(^{st}\) century expansion of ornament.

**Groups, Forms and Ornaments**

The original statement for this thesis comes from an instinct to nominate the group as a type of ornament. How can the group be articulated as a type of ornament? By what method can figures in a picture plane be understood as a group in visual art? How can ornament be configured as a method to accomplish group form? These are some of the questions addressed in this project that point to a persuasive connection between groups, forms and ornament. With reference to the ornament that has presented itself through research, I propose that the linking value for this set of concepts is the notion

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\(^{54}\) Ibid., 34-35.
that society presents itself through ornament and as intensely ornamental. This is not so much an anthropocentric turn for ornament rather it is a reinvigoration of the recognition that ornament has always mediated the subject with the object at the site of societies, groups, and bodies. The object in this instance is supplementary form. This form is the necessity of the group, the activity of the group and produces the group as an entity.

Life is a matter of taking form. From the moment of conception until the hour of death and even beyond, we produce continuous formations. At times these forms are products of instruction and at other times they are a result of circumstantial happenstance. The opportunity to take form is available through multiple methods. This project turns to ornament as a method of formation. It works with the idea that ornament builds an attachment between figures that produces a notion of togetherness for these figures. The figures are enabled to appear as a group. This is a pictured group in a visual artwork equipped with additions that emanate from a family of practices whose referent is ornament.

Additions are decisions. If we look to the history of ornament, a bifurcation occurs in its acceptance. Ornament can be utilized for messages whose narrative although represented allegorically is intentional and clear for its intended audience. These are ornaments whose purpose is to be read as system of signs. It is a linguistic use of ornament. This acceptation prevailed during the 19th century where styles and their ornaments were loaded with allegorical and political meaning. An example is the use of certain decorative motifs by the British Empire whose authority at home and abroad was maintained using a system of material signs incorporating statuary, uniforms, awards, titles, horses, elephants and grand balls. Another example is the sculptures that adorn 19th century official buildings where human, animal and other natural figures are enrolled to present abstract ideals such as liberty and freedom or disciplines such as agriculture and science.55 As Antoine Picon suggests, “To be believable, respected and operative at moments other than those marked by the exercise of sheer force, authority has to be adorned”.56 In a sense this is ornament

55 Ibid., 121.
56 Ibid., 121.
enacted as a very coercive persuasion of order, the aesthetics of politics operating along a continuum between peace and war.

But ornament can also be deployed in the opposite direction. It is equally useful in conjuring a space of opacity, its operative generosity displayed best in the fullness of an indeterminate state whose echoes are the direct inheritance of classical preoccupations with metamorphosis and transformation. This uncertainty incorporating and managing a breadth of expressions that include contemporary notions such as sites of shared intensities, affects, becomings and atmospheres. For this project the space will be intimately linked with the body and ornament’s capacity to establish group entitativity. Undeniably ornament remains as a type of politics of the aesthetic because it is being considered within the social realm but as opposed to this form being envisioned as a static or reified identity, it will be developed within the original terms of the group and retain its uncertainties and its indetermination of meaning. Ornament will be charged with preserving, examining and highlighting the enigmatic qualities of being together through the provision of a surface invested with a material instability that deflects concluding analysis.

The Enigmatics of Togetherness

From Siegfried Kracauer and Benedict Anderson to Hannah Wojciehowski, the musings surrounding the formations of small groups are cursorily mentioned as remaining un-problematized or unconnected with the need to develop form. German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk writes,

The open secret of the historical world is that the power to belong together, which is experienced in exemplary fashion by select couples can be extended to communes, teams, project groups, and perhaps even entire peoples. We refer to this connecting force, using a creaky word from the nineteenth century, as solidarity. The nature of this force, which allies people with their own kind or a superhuman other in shared vibrations, has never been examined sufficiently seriously in the history of thought. So far one has always presupposed and demanded solidarity, has attempted to raise it, politicize it and sabotage it; people
have sung its praises and lamented its fragility; but never has anyone inquired far enough back into its origin.\textsuperscript{57}

Sloterdijk clearly speaks to the presupposition of the group and the lack of enquiry regarding \textit{being together} with this passage. Yet bafflingly he states in the very next sentence that, “At this point we have at least realized that solidarity between people must be a transference phenomenon outside of primary couple relationships and primal hordes”.\textsuperscript{58} One of the main points of departure for this thesis is from the idea that small groups somehow escape the need to ascertain an arrangement or ‘transference phenomenon’ for their being.

Borrowing a phrase from Michel Foucault, small groups certainly seem to fall beneath the threshold of (theoretical) appearance. Maybe this is due to the fact that small group relationships are closely experienced and all pervasive, that their proximity allows them to evade the shape and matter of everyday consciousness. More likely the small group is dismissed because it seems to appear with the status of the natural and to question this status leads to an objectification of our closest bodies. The conception of a group first makes it appearance around the time of the Renaissance. As discussed earlier, this was in part due to the increased mobility of populations with its attendant awareness of peoples from different places with different perceptions and manners. If one’s awareness is raised to the foreignness of other cultures or people, then this awareness of foreignness in a sense begets the awareness of foreignness in general. There is nothing that stops this awareness being applied to those closest to us. A split occurs between the personal cultures of people. There is a micro-cultural cleave that occurs at the site of two or more individuals. This opening generates the dual opportunity to think about what a group is as well as how a group is? And what phenomenon can be supplied to create co-subjectivities that picture the enigmatics of togetherness?

The project questions how to build a group form that has an ornamental sensitivity and how to elucidate an understanding that this con-subjectivity has a climate of its own. It seeks to avoid moralizing or putting into place some super structure about

\textsuperscript{57} Peter Sloterdijk, \textit{Spheres Volume 1: Bubbles Microspherology} (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011) 44-45.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 45.
identity. To move the group away from identity and ideologies and towards an exploration of how we imagine ourselves together. These are not colossal images of totalitarian regimes but images built and created non-the-less to express an apprehension of the particular task of giving visual (and theoretical amplification) to an understanding of the fact that we spend life living together and that this living together produces a type of microclimate. This is not to herald a new method or new way of being but to begin to draw attention to the milieu or intimate complicity or atmosphere that is the nature of existence between beings. As Peter Sloterdijk writes in *Globes*, “Because atmospheres are non-concrete and non-informative by nature (and did not seem controllable), they were passed over by the ancient and modern European culture of reason on its long road to the objectification and informatization of all things and facts. Where discourses developed wills of their own, it became increasingly impossible to waste a single word on the atmospheric exposedness, solubility and disclosedness of existence”.

Is this not the task of ornament?

And finally the research will work with the notion of mood that this connection of beings, this grouping of the figure both produces and provokes. Sloterdijk continues, “When modern philosophy—fundamental ontology in particular—returned from its two-thousand-year exile in the supersensible and began to re-establish its rooting in being-in-the-world, it rightly described mood as the first opening up of existence to the why and wherefore of the world”.

Productively for the research Sloterdijk proposes that moods are “initially never the affair of individuals in the seeming privacy of existential ecstasy; they form as shared atmospheres—emotionally tinted totalities of involvement – between several actors who tint the space of closeness and make room for one another in it”. But in a departure from Sloterdijk’s line of questioning this thesis does not propose an examination of why people are together but rather how people are together. The reasons why people are together could include issues such safety, procreation or recreation and each and everyone of these reasons opens a line of questioning that is productive in and of itself. My suspicion the reason people are together includes generalities, particularities and even peculiarities. This project will instead focus on how people are together and although how initiates as

59 Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres Volume II: Globes Macrospherology* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2014), 137-138.
60 Ibid., 138.
61 Ibid., 138.
many different factors of influence as why, this research will propose one of the ways people ‘be’ together is through an investment in techniques the project identifies as falling under the rubric/custom of ornament.

It is within this family of nuances, these material operatives or details, describing spaces of sentiment, feelings and emotions, moods and atmospheres that a picture for the group will be developed. It is a space of affection or an affecting space and so utilizes ornaments’ capacity to suggest a milieu rather than specify a destination. This is in order to present the group as an arrangement whose purpose is to develop complex mood feelings that exist outside of direct narrative, message or meaning. Yet group-ness remains a persuasion and so the rhetoric or empty ‘talk’ of ornament is harnessed to expand visual opportunities for the pictured group. In a sense the ornament is like the messenger who delivers no message other than the elaboration of an act of delivery. Utilizing this ornament, the project delivers a group that resides upon a fluctuating surface that is complete and yet remains open at the same time.

Artful Forms

In The Life of Forms in Art Henri Focillon writes, “Form is surrounded by a certain aura: although it is our most strict definition of space, it also suggests to us the existence of other forms. It prolongs and diffuses itself throughout our dreams and fancies: we regard it, as it were, as a kind of fissure through which crowds of images aspiring to birth may be introduced into some indefinite realm—a realm which is neither that of physical extent nor that of pure thought”.62 Focillon central hypothesis is that forms in art are inherently dynamic systems rather than static presences; that they ceaselessly change through time and so have life. He moves through the idea that the changes in perception afforded by history, in turn change the perception of form. He writes from the perspective of the viewer of art, as well as the artist and finally to the form itself. He argues that art(forms) are not reducible to external political, social or economic determinates rather they continue to develop through past, present and future time in a continuous process of becoming. Incorporating figure, abstraction and

signification within his conception of form, Focillon sees form as inseparable from movement. They are alive in that they are never immobile.\textsuperscript{63}

Regarding figurative form Focillon writes, “The models of nature may themselves be regarded as the stem and support of metamorphoses. The body of man and the body of woman can remain virtually constant, but the ciphers capable of being written with the bodies of men and women are inexhaustibly various, and this variety works on, activates and inspires all works of art, from the most elaborate to the most serenely simple”.\textsuperscript{64} He cites those compositions by Raphael that are, “laden with whole garlands of human bodies that we can best comprehend the genius for harmonic variations that combines over and over again those shapes wherein the life of forms has absolutely no aim other than itself and its own renewal.”\textsuperscript{65} He chooses the mathematicians in the \textit{School of Athens}, the soldiers in the \textit{Massacre of Innocents} and the fishermen in the \textit{Miracle of the Fishes} as examples of, “successive interlaces of a formal thought composed of and supported by the human body and by means of which are contrived symmetries, contrappostos and alternating rhythms”.\textsuperscript{66} Once again the artful groups of the Renaissance make their appearance. The mass ornament accomplishes the same feat, only this time for a much larger group. Nevertheless a similar means of choreographed symmetries and rhythms are used to style a coordinated and stabilized entity.

Benedict Anderson brilliantly suggests that groups are distinguished by the style in which they are imagined. Focillon refers to Raphael’s depictions of the grouped figure as ornaments of human form nominating style as their organizing principle. Contemplating the term \textit{style} he writes, “This term has two very different, indeed opposite meanings. Style is an absolute. A style is a variable… In utilizing style as an absolute, we give expression to a very fundamental need: that of beholding ourselves in our widest possible intelligibility, our most stable, our most universal aspect. A style, on the other hand, is a development, a coherent grouping of forms united by a reciprocal fitness, whose essential harmony is nevertheless in many ways testing itself, building itself and annihilating itself. Pauses, tensions, relaxations occur in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 10.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 42.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 44.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 44.
\end{itemize}
Anderson and Focillon both refer to style as a method to form groups. Anderson’s groups are sociologically extant whilst Focillon’s remain in the pictorial realm but both groups are imagined or imaged through an adornment of surface to produce either style or a style. Significantly, groups are recognized as artful forms.

67 Ibid., 46.
PART THREE: An Act of Delivery

Parts one and two are concerned with the establishment of workable definitions and theoretical links between group and ornament. These sections revolve around the question *how can the group be articulated as ornament?* I sought to find an answer to this question using a theoretical approach that mainly involved literature searches and academic research. However at the same time I was looking for models. Actual visual models, artworks or concepts that not only corroborated my suspicion that groups were in fact ornaments or at the very least had a surfeit of ornamental qualities but also indicated a way forward for the visual work. The question remained the same but the method of inquiry had to shift and accommodate the realm of making. This search became less directed and more a matter of tuning to accept frequencies that I could identify on a very intuitive level as having some characteristics of actual *group-ornaments.* Part three will deal with the artists, ideas and artworks that were utilized to activate my practice towards ornament and to craft an image of the group-ornament. These works are not presented in the order of their importance; rather they are collected together as a constellation of procedural tools that were referred to on a per need basis over the course of the project. These works are the sticky ideas in high rotation, the essay on the top of the heap and the visual reference pinned to the studio wall that resisted irrelevance and continued to inform my shape-shifting practice. What follows are the intellectual and artistic terrains that allowed a delivery of the group-ornament to visible form.

The Supplement

Ornament as an overall property of texture and pattern that is inseparable from its support is a relatively recent expression. In its traditional acceptation ornament paradoxically was all the more indispensible in that it was actually added, and that one could imagine an item without it. This status possesses a philosophical dimension in that ornament has the capacity of the supplement to become a defining feature of that to which it is added.¹ Philosopher Jacques Derrida’s notion of the supplement moves through his oeuvre as he addresses the idea of signification and meaning in

language and writing. Positioned in the mid-twentieth century at the end of two world wars, Derrida’s view is one of a systemic loss of center and meaning in western science and philosophy. This lack however allows for the movement of the supplement. According to Derrida, the supplement is neither inside nor outside, the feature nor the thing; it blurs these hierarchies and so does not correspond to a stable category of forms.² He writes, “The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified”.

So the presence of the supplement speaks to a lack for the original item. In the essay “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” this lack is in fact construed as a loss of origin. With this essay Derrida engages in a critique of Claude Levi-Strauss’ concern for mythic origins. He moves towards a new conception for sign that evidences an ontological uncertainty that possesses generative capacities nonetheless. The supplement in this way can be associated with a movement across and between ideas that have lost their specificity or security. Significations are granted play or freeplay and this award opens up a form of play that encompasses the manifold expressions of play. With Derrida a conception of play as a type of game does not preclude an understanding of play as a scope of activity (as in to give free play to one’s faculties). Play as pertaining to the unimpeded movement or the proper motion for a mechanism or a living body is also conjured. Derrida’s loss of center is conceived as the “joyous affirmation of the freeplay of the world and without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation”.⁴

Derrida argues that the field of conceptual approach is not limitless nor is it exclusive of the ability of total apprehension; rather he sees the field as finite. It is “a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble”.⁵ Derrida’s supplement affords a method to approach ornament as a type of auxiliary addition that allows an infinite passage between items to form ensembles. The evacuation of center or the

² Ibid., 38.
⁴ Ibid., 369.
⁵ Ibid., 365.
notion that the center is not fixed but migrates around whatever is attempting to present itself literally opens up a field of activity. Ornament envisaged as having the capacity of the supplement shifts the notion of ornament from product to process. To use ornament to form the group implies a type of practice and by practice I mean both artistic practice and practice done many times over to acquire knowledge or skill. Derrida’s idea of infinite substitutions points to a working method that includes the acting out and materialization of types of things that have a fugitive or decentering quality whilst retaining some ability to form an ensemble. It allows me to practice this de-centering over and over within my works through a handling of details. I call upon material items such as postures, gestures and costumes and add these to my figures. What details will be put into play? Do the figures themselves become a type of ornament? How to make ornament become a defining feature? I practice the group articulated as ornament.

**Becoming**

The supplement and the idea of perpetual practice countenance a form for the group-ornament in which securing identity is not the crucial question. This was very important for the project. The point was to establish an anonymous group whose main employment was an expression of sociability rather than a development of identity. I framed identity as a type of purposeful narrative that in its over-determination and desire for stability explained away anything of lasting interest. The artworks needed the little rubs and nubs of indecipherability in order to ruminate upon groupness as a thing in general. I looked for models that avoided the installation of narrative devices that lent order or stability to a depiction of the group. I found Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of *becoming* useful in the fact that they gave actual examples of types of becoming such as becoming-child, becoming-woman and becoming-animal but circumvented an understanding of these becomings as having an end point concerned with stasis. “What becomings undermine are stable identities, those “fixed terms” given to us by the majority culture as the framework within which our world is to be understood and acted upon. In undermining stable identities, becomings do not
substitute other stable identities or fixed terms for the abandoned ones… Becomings, in short, are moments of becoming”.

To develop the concept of becoming Deleuze and Guattari refer to The Waves by, “Virginia Woolf—who made all of her life and work a passage, a becoming, all kinds of becomings between ages, sexes, elements, and kingdoms—intermingles seven characters, Bernard, Neville, Louis, Jinny, Rhoda, Suzanne, and Percival. But each of these characters, with his or her name, its individuality, designates a multiplicity (for example, Bernhard and the school of fish). Each is simultaneously in this multiplicity and at its edge, and crosses over into the others”. To break down the boundaries between characters, Woolf utilizes a sequencing structure that is bound together by rhythm as opposed to plot. Repeating images occur across multiple voices to build a shared group consciousness. Woolf’s technique points to an expression of shared consciousness that is developed through the management of details and motifs. Deleuze and Guattari have nominated Woolf’s book as an example of becoming. Woolf’s group-subject could also be understood as an articulation of the group-ornament because this entity is constituted through shared forms that stream across the surface of multiple figures in an artistic exploration of a group. The group is fashioned outside of direct narrative or message.

For Deleuze and Guattari philosophy was not a matter of description or explanation. They felt that the history of philosophy and philosophical activity was tied too closely to a project of promoting identity and a “dogmatic image of thought”. They felt that philosophical reflection sought to rest in a stable unity and that certain socially dominate points of view were unduly privileged. Deleuze and Guattari developed and fostered a philosophical practice whose point was not getting the right take on things but on making contribution to our living. Philosophical practice took a constitutive turn. Like Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari were expressing a new way forward for philosophy that shifted the search from stable or transcendental entities to an active engagement with ideas that were elusive, minor and multiply resonant. The

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7 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 278.
8 Ibid., 140.
supplement and becoming both deal with instability. These concepts commit to perspectives that are multivalent and populating in the sense that they never come to rest in a single identity and so are ceaselessly creative. Becoming specifically deals with becomings-minor and purposefully undercuts dominant discourses to turn towards those whose arrangements are less acknowledged: becoming-woman, becoming-child, becoming-animal.

The supplement and becoming initiate ways of thinking that embrace associations between and transfers across concepts. In this way both ideas deal with intellectual movement. The supplement moves around and through ideas. It traffics substances across notions of the inside and the outside and calls into question boundaries between form and content. It proposes that there is no thing, only the thing in concert with its addition. The added, extra or auxiliary status of the supplement points to the fact that something is missing for the thing to which the supplement is added. It also suggests indispensability because its addition determines everything. Importantly the addition incorporates a set of variables (of thinking) rather than a single unit (of thought). To utilize the supplement in my practice, I imagined it as an intervention in the images I was creating. I reframed the supplement as an ornamental inclusion that activated a notion of my figures as belonging to each other and to the artifacts or actions they displayed. The supplement also became any device that attached the figures to the landscape. Of course the opposite is also in effect, in that the figures could be imagined without these accouterments, the landscape without these people and so on. Referring back to Criticos’s ornamental dimension, I visualized the supplement as dealing with the space that occurs on the coronal plane. This is a plane of motion that moves from front to back and visa versa.

Becoming allowed me to concentrate on promoting alliances between things whose boundaries appeared clear-cut. By placing items like figures, wiggling machines, dogs and rocks next to each other in the picture plane, I organized a perception of entitativity utilizing the principle of proximity. But as Campbell notes proximity can establish entitativity but it is not essential to it, rather it is the least successful principle in evoking this perception. Becoming adds a productive complexity to the notion of proximity by situating seemingly discrete items or concepts together and then working with these as interacting complexes. This interaction envisages a
communicating world⁹ where “slipping in between things and growing in the midst of things”¹⁰ is available as a mode of production. Deleuze offers the method of becoming to open up new pathways through which thinking and living can travel that sets us free from a world that oppresses us with its identities.¹¹ I took this Deleuzean entreaty as an opportunity to explore proximity as a type of metaphorical join. The intersection between things was brought from the conceptual world into the material world by literally enacting this join through material objects. Because I was developing the group-ornament, I worked towards linking substances that retained playfulness in their composition. Like Virginia Woolf and Deleuze and Guattari, I returned to objects that I have been handling since childhood with a renewed understanding that their modesty and minority as conceptual items did not diminish their importance as things to think through.

The concept of becoming establishes another route for the group envisaged as an occupant of the ornamental dimension, only this time the movement happens across the picture plane and between figures. I visualized becoming as something that occurs in the sagittal plane. Undeniably both becoming and the supplement shift around and between these planes. It is this activity that ultimately lends these notions their liveliness and their intellectual freedom, putting playful conceptual movement into play. I use these theories conceptually, materially and also as a series of technical coordinates or compositional points. These points allow me to organize the picture plane through a handling of surface movement. I address both the picture plane and the group within it as a type of dynamic concoction that is composed of frequencies, intensities and diminishments. Additions, accessories and trims that generate motion as well as motion derived from bodily movements and patterns in the landscape become my source material. The supplement and becoming allow me to understand that movement is critical to the realization of the group-ornament and that this movement should occur in multiple directions and be a consideration throughout all stages of production. A practical attention to motion should broker a lush, enigmatic and open surface with regards to both composition and concept. Because I was trying to build a dynamic form I needed to establish coordinates that could not be fully

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⁹ Ibid., 280.
¹⁰ Ibid., 280.
¹¹ May, “When is Deleuzean becoming?,” 151.
contained. With reference to the supplement and becoming, I realized the group-ornament didn’t need rehearsed choreography. It required circumstance and adaptation; practice and play.

In the most practical terms I used the notion of the supplement to organize compositions and camera framing for images that moved from the back of the picture plane to the front and visa versa. I envisioned the *Birds of a Feather* video as utilizing a supplementary effect as the figures walk towards the camera. They disappear as they enter a slight dip in the paddock and then reappear into the image. The camera pulls back into a wide shot as the figures continue to push forward. The action of the figures concentrates an arc of movement that proceeds through the picture plane. In order to manage this direction I worked with all of the components inside the picture frames as types of addition. The figures were additions to the landscape and the popcorn hats were additions to the figures. I imagined this video as being built from a surface that proceeds by extending out frontally into space.

*The Wigglers*, on the other hand, was imagined utilizing the notion of becoming. This work moves through space across the horizontal plane. While building this work, I continually tried to emphasize and basically keep in mind the idea that there is a join between things. I set up a single, wide shot for my camera and let the action take place across the frame and between items and figures. I didn’t directly choreograph my characters movements but set the tone for their action by placing them in the exercise machines. These machines moved from side to side. The aim was to have a lot of horizontal rhythm in both composition and actual movement. I was experimenting with this compositional direction, keeping in mind the notion of becoming. This was in order to stream information across the surface of the picture and so develop the group-ornament accomplished through a type of horizontal transfer.

**Schmuck** (Adornment)

Architect Gottfied Semper writes, “Surrounded by a world of wonder and forces—whose laws he is aware of and strives to resolve, yet never unravels, laws that thrust towards him as fragmentary harmonies and sustain his feelings in a continuous state
of excitation—man conjures up the perfection that eludes him through play and builds for himself a miniature world in which the cosmic laws appear in their most narrow and compact form, yet complete in themselves, and in this respect perfect. And it is through such play that man fulfills his cosmogonic instinct. This extract exemplifies Semper’s overall approach to ornament as a universal human instinct. According to Semper it is through ornament that humanity theorizes, develops and practices ideas that explicate the origin of the universe. For Semper ornaments’ organizing principles take material form through articles of bodily adornment. In this way he links bodily adornments to the accomplishment of expressing an organized, coherent and manageable world structure.

Semper was writing in the mid-nineteenth century when contemporary scholarship turned towards archaeological and ethnographic studies. These studies produced a bounty of artifacts of which a large portion were archaeological and ethnographic specimens of bodily decoration. These specimens formed not only the base for theoretical study but also a platform for popular entertainment. The spectacular adornments discovered in the burial chambers of Egyptian pyramids, the masses of jewelry dug out from under the city walls of Troy and the trafficking of decorative treasures from around the globe, revived or brought to light entire civilizations. These civilizations were envisioned, “less through the recovery of massive architectural monuments, but rather by restoring the glimmer of small and seemingly marginal articles, such as golden buttons, finger rings, hairpins, headbands and metal brooches… as if the core and substance of the universe was concentrated on its glittering surface”.

One such presentation was Semper’s 1856 lecture entitled “On the Formal Principles of Adornment and Its Meaning as a Symbol in Art”. Delivered to an audience

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14 Ibid., 309-310.  
15 Kathryn Schoefert and Spyros Papapetros translated this lecture from German into English in 2010. This is presently the sole access to Semper’s theories in English.
primarily composed of Zurich’s most prestigious society ladies, this lecture was recently translated into English by Katheryn Schoefert and Spyros Papapetros in 2010. In this lecture Semper puts forward his theory that bodily adornsments and their movement act as miniature models of the world. These adornsments not only act as tiny worlds they also demonstrate the physical properties of the world at large. Remarkably Semper takes a small artifact of bodily decoration, which is celebrated as often as it is despised, and redeems it as a model of cosmic and scientific organization. These adornsments refer to particular types of ornament that Semper identified and named Schmuck. He further delineates Schmuck as having three structural categories: the pendant, the ring and the directional ornament.

“The pendant is an oscillating apparatus usually with a free end, such as an earring or a medallion hanging from a chain that has a periodic form of movement. In its suspension the pendant accentuates the cosmic law of gravity and is therefore deemed a macrocosmic ornament. Embodied the oscillation between movement and equilibrium, pendants emphasize symmetry and therefore often appear in pairs. Apart from jewelry … fabric folds in garments are classified as pendants, since they are earthbound and hang symmetrically.” Semper classifies hair as a pendant including braids and even beards. “The aesthetic value of the pendant derives from its vertical suspension, which accentuates the curvatures of the face, neck and other body parts it decorates. But it also has psychological value since it externalizes the character and temperament of the wearer: the hanging earrings of a nervous woman, for example, would move spasmodically and oscillate too much. The pendant, then, not only measures, but also moderates the carrier’s internal and external movements, translating decorum into decoration.”

The second category of adornment is the ring or annular ornament. This category includes necklaces, finger rings, toe rings, waistbands or chains, headbands, leg-bands and armbands. Semper conceptualizes these articles as signifying a microscopic

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18 Ibid., 314.
19 Ibid., 314.
relationship between the body and its parts. He suggests annular enhancements can also provide bodily support or emphasize stoutness and power. The ring can also bestow or accentuate social power upon the wearer; an example would be a royal crown. Semper theorized that the ring ornament not only absorbs all of the attention to it, but also reflects that energy back into the world. He imagined it as the fulcrum of centripetal and centrifugal relationships and so the ring ornament functions especially as a symbol of social formations. The operations of a wedding ring fit perfectly within Semper’s subcategory of annular Schmuck.

The third category is the directional ornament. Semper identifies this category as a form of adornment that is loose and therefore indicative of the direction of movement in the carrier’s body. Feathers, plumes and banners are examples of directional ornament. Semper postulates that although having neither rhythm nor symmetry, directional ornament is the most spiritual because it “projects the grace, movement, character and the expression of appearance”. Semper emphasizes the significance of directional ornament to the battlefield, with these types of adornments turning “movement into an ornament by transforming the battlefield into an arena of traveling line, dots and patterns”. Spyros Papapetros advances the theory that directional ornaments, due to their battlefield origins, speak to a world in flux whereas ring ornaments and pendants give voice to the classical idea of a coherent and predictable world. But flags and feathers are not the sole province of the battlefield and all types of Schmuck can be revised and reimagined according to what can only be understood as the dialectics of ornament.

Although Papapetros has nominated ring and pendant as evocations of an ordered world (or order in general) and directional ornaments as indications of a world in flux, I hesitate to fix these types within particular spaces in perpetuity. An experience I encountered while driving down a mountain in extremely heavy rain illustrates the point. Because it was daylight some drivers did not think to turn on their headlights, these vehicles became impossible to understand. I couldn’t gage how fast they were going or how close they were. They were chaotic entities. They disappeared without

20 Ibid., 314-315.
21 Ibid., 315.
22 Ibid., 315.
their brake light accessory. The cars with their brake lights on gained a temporary addition that I imagined as a type of directional ornament. This added feature allowed me to establish how close the cars were and how fast they were going, thus diminishing disorder. This experience was a direct confirmation of Semper’s directional ornament and its capacity to display trajectories of movement. The experience also points to the ability of Semper’s categories to be suggestive of both stasis and dynamism depending on how adornment is deployed by the carrier and perceived. Rather than having a final destination or determination, Semper’s Schmuck moves between moments of fixity and instability, carrier and perceiver. This does not diminish the value of classifying Schmuck according to type but rather instigates the awareness that these types are prone to transposition. In this way ornament in the form of Schmuck is further implicated in ideas that hover between determination and instability like becoming and the supplement.

Semper’s theory of Schmuck was invaluable to the research because it affirmed the connection between bodily adornment and expressions of being in the world. In other words Semper recognized and seriously engaged with bodily accessories as a method by which people create and understand the world. Also, he pinpoints an exploration of adornment set unquestionably within the field of ornament and so engages with ornament as a family of practices that includes activities such as adornment and decoration. His Schmuck/adornment is identified as a concrete artifact pertaining mainly to bodily enhancement, such as a piece of jewelry, a necklace or the fabric folds in a garment. Costume or the act of costuming is openly imagined as a form of ornament. Most importantly of all, his discussion of ornamentation does not evolve around disembodied geometric shapes, but objects that have weight and physical dimensions and which through their very movement and direction inscribe themselves into the world.23

For the most part Semper tries to maintain a split between the artifact and the carrier. However he does imagine the spasmodic movement of a nervous woman’s earrings as the externalization of her internal state. He also touches upon adornment practices that involve inserting bones, shells or wooden plugs into the body, invasive piercing.

techniques and apotropaic costumes. These are not included in his three categories of Schmuck but he does discuss them as representing a formless or pre-linguistic stage in the evolution of adornment that will later develop into more pleasing decorations. This marginalization of adornment practices that breach bodily boundaries refers ornament back to ideas of primitivism, decorum and misuse of adornment in general. Loos’s essay describes this exact horror for the 19th century mind. I would argue that this split/non-split between the body and its artifact is essentially the crucial space of ornament. It is where the dialectical operation of ornament originates. Does the adornment invade its carriers? What is it that is meaning to be pointed to? Semper moves away from a discussion of adornments that he perceives as having an inarticulate quality but I would claim this ambiguity remains for even the most inoffensive act or item if it is deployed successfully as an ornament.

Semper’s focus on bodily adornment approaches the figure through its external appearance. This human surface is modified as an expression of peoples’ engagement with their surroundings. Whatever these surroundings are composed of in a cultural sense, whatever world-views are espoused, the act of adornment expresses a material practice in which questioning and thinking is accomplished through the manipulation or embellishment of bodily surfaces. This idea is key to the project. It supports the proposition that ornament is enacted to form the group and that the group becomes present through ornamenting techniques. It allows the research to move forward with the construction of a group-ornament by performing and documenting a series of modifications on a set of figures. Through these adjustments the research seeks to form a notion of group-ness and sociability that radiates from a surface display. The project takes its cue from Semper’s Schmuck as opposed to Kracauer’s mass ornament. The group does not have to succumb to the tight molds or Procrustean bed of geometry; rather it can play itself out through the discretion of accouterments, accessories and adornments.

Semper conceptualizes Schmuck as a method to think through cosmic questions of arrangement. He envisions a destination of order as intrinsic to the ornamenting

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activity. In contrast, Aby Warburg’s theory of *bewegtes Beiwerk* reconceptualizes Semper’s *Schmuck* into a type of accessory in motion. Writing in the early 1890’s, Warburg analyzed the descriptions of accessories in antique and Renaissance texts as well as the representation of ‘accessories in motion’ in works of visual art. He expounded the windblown hair and whirling fabrics of Botticelli’s paintings as examples of *bewegtes Beiwerk*. Warburg’s approach was not concerned with the complex mythological representation these accessories were thought to depict; rather he viewed these ornaments as explications of the condition of agitation and stasis that was occurring during the Renaissance in general. Semper’s lawful formations become Warburg’s analogues of aberrant change. Of course the forty-odd years that separate Semper and Warburg also bear witness to a great shift from older orders towards the syncopations of modernism. Perhaps Warburg’s agitated accessories were a reflection of a general condition of anxiety that was being experienced in the last decade of the 19th century as this transition occurred.²⁵

The social conditions that underpin the conception and advancement of Semper and Warburg’s theories will not be investigated due to the limits of this project. Instead the research puts forward a few useful insights drawn from their ideas held in common. The first is that both approach an understanding of ornament through an investigation of bodily adornment. In this way information is recovered from items that have traditionally held a marginalized status as sources of knowledge. The second is that bodily decorations or the artifacts used in this adornment are treated as belonging within a category of objects nominated as ornament. The ornamental field is therefore expanded and considered to include items of bodily embellishment like fabric, jewelry and hairstyles. The third is that this knowledge, although emanating at times from the tiniest object, has the ability to conjure spaces as capacious as the universe. And finally, both Semper and Warburg share the notion that bodily adornments act, “as ideograms of not only physical, but also conceptual movement; while grounded in real artifacts, they express modes of relationality and being in the world”.²⁶

²⁶ Ibid., 318-319.
An ideogram does not represent the object pictured but rather some thing or idea that the object pictured is supposed to suggest. For Semper and Warburg what is represented by small material objects of personal adornment is not the item itself but the item perceived as an expression of human connection to the world, to the cosmos. Pictured here is a humanity that moves through, is subject to and responsive towards the movements of the world. This notion returns me to my original hunch that groups in general can be identified as a type of ornament. The ornament whether connecting humanity to the universe or connecting people to each other acts as a device that suggests alliances between things; a communicating world. The project proposes that ornament forms the group, not as a final destination but as a conceptual horizon. This extends ornament by reframing it as a practice that not only expresses notions of being in the world but also as an activity that continues to test or suggest new ways of being in the world. Ornament as a practice that experiments with other modes of presentation. Ornament more akin to a style than style. Semper and Warburg’s engagement with bodily adornment as a type of ideogram precedes Grabar’s discussion of ornament as a rhetorical device for the presentation of other ideas, moods or feelings by one hundred years. Grabar’s intermediaries remain upon surfaces that are not alive such as pots, tiles and buildings, while Semper and Warburg make a direct link between living human bodies and their surface treatment.

This link corroborates a perception of groups as a type of ornament. It allows an association to be drawn that I could intuitively feel about groups yet couldn’t articulate previously. It is that surfaces whether living or non-living present as an opportunity to speak to other things. The discussion, whatever it may concern, is procured and continued through surface modulation. Because the research deals with the group as a type of ornament, this project highlights ornaments’ ability to enact a communicating world. It explores ornaments’ faculty to amalgamate entities that appear to have their own boundaries. The group is examined in reference to the activity of grouping. Ornament is investigated as a technique to perform grouping and subsequently present the group. The ideological message of the group is not what is at stake here; rather it is the act of messaging and the art of grouping. This allows ornament to stay fluid and open, expressing the group as a type of continuous message device.
I will also suggest that once a body or figure is adorned, it automatically attains the status of a group. This is because added appendages or accessories invariably mark territories of inclusion or exclusion. These areas extend anywhere from sections marked on a single body, such as a belt around a waist that visually and metaphorically splits the body into halves, to ornaments that demarcate geographic and cultural boundaries. Ornament moves from the micro to the macro expressing imaginary worlds whose patterns express ideas, inclusions, exclusions, territories and boundaries. These adornments allow a body to display and receive extra information. They extend the body’s capacity; supplement it and allow new ‘bodies’ to become.

The supplement, becoming, *Schmuck* and *bewegtes Beiwerk* are models that remain in the form of ideas. Yet, they elucidate notions through an examination of physical items or with suggestions to consciously alter normative thinking practice. I imagine these as concepts that function somewhere between thought, action and material. Because of this co-existent currency, they are useful theoretical forms that enable me to leave the task of defining my conceptual framework, which was the task located in the earlier portion of my thesis, and move closer to devising an approach to the practical component. These ideas are the stepping-stones that allow me to bridge concept with material and position myself in readiness for research that is conducted through artistic practice. Fundamentally these concepts enable a development of the physical arena as well as the material components situated within it. Through this research I have ascertained that the surface of the group-ornament image should include dynamic movement across or through the picture plane. It should focus on material elements or additions that have actual physical movement or some sort of openness of appearance. With the expression ‘openness of appearance’ I am referring to artifacts or visual inclusions that maintain an enigmatic presence or instability of meaning in order to activate conceptual movement. The research concludes that ornament can legitimately take the shape of bodily adornments or accessories, with these attachments effecting a blurring of boundaries between feature and thing or content and form. And finally, that these modifications should raise questions regarding the status between carrier and adornment.
The Rococo

The project looks towards the Rococo as a mode of expression that is deeply associated with a decorative or ornamental style in effort to develop a visual exemplar for the artworks. Allison Stedman offers an effective explanation of the Rococo in her book *Rococo Fiction in France 1600-1715: Seditious Frivolity*. She writes,

> Although scholars disagree somewhat on the identity of the rococo’s earliest practitioners, they generally accept the idea that the rococo emerged as a strategy of resistance to the classical-baroque aesthetic and to the absolutist political system, a resistance manifested by the rococo’s rejection of the organizing principles common to both. In contrast to the diagonals of the baroque and the fixed closed proportions of classicism, the rococo privileges serpentine lines of beauty and constructs stories by means of scenes and pictures. While the classical-baroque is preoccupied with projecting order and stability in keeping with the goals of the emerging absolute monarchy, the rococo seeks to represent the opposite of stability, taking pleasure in plurality, hybridity, variety, vivacity, worldliness and wit. While the classical-baroque uses strong diagonals to create centralized compositions stabilized by strong triangular structures, the rococo features swirling, sensual, atectonic compositions characterized by the absence of centre and a disorientation as to where the centre actually occurs. While the classical-baroque privileges such grandiose subject matter as battles, religious themes and heroic actions, the rococo seeks instead to memorialize the unique yet ordinary moments of the human experience.  

The Rococo is seen as a stylistic break from the established aesthetic symbols of religion and politics. Artistic composition turns towards informality, mobility and fragmentation as ideas turn towards relativism, tolerance, cosmopolitanism and creating a new style of living. The Rococo is usually associated with the privileged aristocratic classes and the plastic arts but Stedman offers the notion that, “the aesthetic first manifested in generically heterogeneous literary creations that sprang up in diverse areas of society—from salons and convents to print shops and prisons. In the seventeenth century, rococo is not dominated by a particular social class or associated with a specific socio-cultural agenda; instead such works are resolutely individualistic, united only by a commitment to valorizing individual creative

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28 Ibid., 7
potential over all forms of authoritarianism”. 29 Stedmen sets the emergence of Rococo within the timeframe of the Classical-Baroque and envisions the relationship as “dialectic rather than successive or sequential”. 30 She cites an example of the heterogeneity foundational to the rococo as expressed by a popular form of literary production whose generic diversity enabled an evasion of “systemic categorization and critique”. 31 “In this aesthetic of literary production, novelistic plots of all lengths and subtypes are conceptualized, not as independent stories, but rather as parts of larger, multifarious wholes, sharing the space between book covers with letters, portraits, treatises, dialogues, proverb plays, ghost stories, fairy tales, histories, autobiographies, confessions, psalm paraphrases, gossip, meditations, comedies, tragedies, aphorisms, allegories and poetry—to name a few examples.” 32

Within this twenty-first century conceptualization of the Rococo one can hear reverberations of zines, punk, DIY, cross-disciplinarity, installation art, You-Tube, FaceBook and the Internet. The democratization of publication, or to put a finer point on it self-publication, essentially results in new and hybrid forms. The driver for this machine of individualistic expression undoubtedly had something to do with access to new technologies in printing during the seventeenth century just as it is advanced by developments in information technologies today. The works for this PhD are a contemporary case in point. Not but ten years ago, cameras with the capacity to capture high definition images were out of reach to most artists who were working outside of the institution and funding of the film industry. Yet my crew and I set off into the wilderness wielding two high definition cameras as well as a 4 K unit for extra measure. Not only did we have cameras, but also we had remote monitors to assess the images out in the field, multiple lightweight, long-life batteries and external sound equipment roughly the size of a mobile phone. Not to mention portable editing suites on personal computers to be utilized once the footage was ‘in the can’, so to speak.

The integration between art, technology and society is duly noted, however it will not be expanded upon in this dissertation. Instead the research will point out that the

29 Ibid., 8
30 Ibid., 8
31 Ibid., 3
32 Ibid., 3
reconceptualization of the rococo takes place in the twenty-first century utilizing the events that are experienced by its scholars, much in the same way that accessories in the form of Schmuck are reformulated around the time of great ethnographic expositions. And also, that an expression of the Rococo as (re)constituted by capacities or questions that change through time, directly supports Focillon’s central hypothesis that forms in art are inherently dynamic systems and so have a life that extends into time. Importantly the complexity of the Rococo is revived with new scholarship examining it as both a “veneer of structured aesthetic choices”33 and as a less stable identifying discourse of heterogeneous creative output set against the dominant discourses of authority. Allison Stedman primarily discusses the Rococo within the terms of literary practice but her evaluation of the Rococo as a type of practice that values and liberates individual or even idiosyncratic creative potential is equally applicable to the visual arts.

Melissa Lee Hyde and Katie Scott explore the Rococo with an acknowledgement of its persistence through time in their book Rococo echo: art, history and historiography from Cochin to Coppola. Hyde and Scott’s book includes essays from an international team of contributors that collect under the notion of Rococo but position themselves in a multiplicity of ways. The Rococo is elucidated within the terms of style and temporality and so becomes open to far ranging interpretations and ideas. For example in Tom Stammers’ essay “Scavenging Rococo: trouvailles, bibelots and counter-revolution”, the Rococo is presented through the lens of mid-nineteenth century connoisseurship. During this time a few canny collectors scoured the rubbish tips, junkshops and flea markets of Paris snapping up furniture, paintings and decorative objects that had previously been deemed worthless and amoral, frothy expressions of the louche ancien régime. These collectors had different reasons for this act of rescue, extending from a loathing of Republicanism to a sentimental identification with the unwitting courtiers and courtesans of a world soon to be lost to horror.34 As the Rococo is undeniably associated with France and as a French style,
this salvage could be understood as an incipient act of nationalism, a nationalism that visually composes itself through the retrieval and restoration of previously reviled material objects. I also suggest these nineteenth century romanticisms, in their precipitous abutment between fortune and fate, value and frivolity, continue to inform our feelings regarding the Rococo to this day.

Hyde and Scott include essay topics that address the twentieth century and beyond, with artists such as Andy Warhol, Yinka Shonibare and Sofia Coppola discussed with regard to their use of Rococo elements in their visual works. Warhol is identified as utilizing, “the language of Rococo to provide an outlet for a camp parody of high culture and fashion, while also asserting an alternative sexual politics”. 35 His butterflies, fairies, flowers and lovers, especially present in his drawings and illustrations of the 1950’s, signaled a playful attitude that Warhol used to stand out from the crowd. This “feminized” light touch and decorative embellishment stood in complete opposition to the macho posturing of the Abstract Expressionists. 37 Yinka Shonibare’s 2006 installation Garden of Love reimagines Fragonard’s painted scenes of love, utilizing the Rococo style and its attendant history to critique post-colonialism and slavery. 38 His installation comprised of, “life-size models in extravagant dresses with garlands and props posed in an artificial maze of leaves and trellises… replacing the familiar fête galante landscapes… The delicate rose tints and pale silk and lace, replaced with African imported textiles or ‘waxes’ with their garish colours and harsh textures, patterned with contemporary logos”. 39 Shonibare’s exquisitely costumed mannequins are headless, “turning his fashion dummies into uncanny evocations of guillotined lovers, fusing times as well as spaces and

36 Ibid., 277.
37 Ibid., 277.
39 Ibid., 313.
The films of Sophia Coppola are discussed in terms of her use of Rococo inspired imagery, “as a means to think about memory, femininity and feelings”. Pastel colours, fashion and soft focus are some of the devices Coppola deploys in the form of a ‘new Rococo’. As Rebecca Arnold writes, “This is an aesthetic that at times explicitly evokes its eighteenth-century predecessor to construct an ideal of femininity that celebrates surface, frivolity and irony”.

Melissa Hyde offers the recognition that rococo has never been a stable term, but is instead, “protean, contingent, sometimes illusive, often allusive and wildly varied in uses, meanings and its echoes”. She condenses the space of the Rococo by offering a few constants that have maintained a continued relationship with it through time. These include, “the insistent association of the Rococo with femininity and women, with non-normative masculinity, with dreams, and the ways in which it is often deployed as a vehicle of resistance of one kind or another”. Of course all of these are associations that hold true for ornament in general, with the feminization of the ‘ornamental continuum’ noted earlier in reference to the works of Parker, Pollock and Schor. The research suggests however that the rococo ornament in particular amplifies the decorative, feminine, enigmatic and imaginary qualities of ornament and pushes them to the surface of its object without apology, not only in its restitution but also in and of its original appearance. Once again this notion is complicated by the assignation and ideation of gender and the research has not addressed this aspect other than to refer to it in passing through the course of this project. This is because the project focuses on the practical or visual device of ornament and its pragmatic, bodily and sensory effects rather than its deployment as an ideological perspective.

The original vision of the Rococo takes its inspiration and style of decoration from rocaille, which refers to the forms found in water-worn rocks and shells. This surface

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40 Hyde and Scott, *Rococo echo: art, history and historiography from Cochin to Coppola*, 364.
42 Ibid., 295.
43 Hyde and Scott, *Rococo echo: art, history and historiography from Cochin to Coppola*, 338.
44 Ibid., 338.
speaks to a non-geometric, seemingly dis-ordered, and literally eccentric exterior. The logic of this type of surface is found in its vitality of expression, its decorative value and its ability to evade narrative. In this way the exterior is privileged and becomes a subject in its own right. The research suggests the Rococo deployed ornament as a type of self-aware performance that placed style at the center of its action. Its association with frivolity, play, charm, fashion and temporality indicate a distinguishing hallmark for the ‘rococo ornament’ in that it points to its own surface as a construct rather than an absolute. The surface, far from being an afterthought or an abomination, is the chosen method with which to play at modes of being, thought and representation. The Rococo is deeply involved with the surface as a critical space of creation.

Katie Scott explains that the Rococo is given its first general dictionary definition in 1842 but that this definition did not ascertain precise periodization nor did it establish a set of formal traits. Rather the ancient régime acts as a common denominator for a random collection of figurative forms and fashions of dress and decoration. She proposes that the Rococo is located not in the specific form of detail, its association with curves and coils, rather it is a question of detail. Detail is the technology of the Rococo. “It is the figure of Gilles, the pansy and the fan…Rococo is grasped and understood in its parts or ornaments, rather than its ensemble.” Scott is referring to a Rococo that is being experienced as an echo in the nineteenth century. The detail of the Rococo has an elusively nostalgic presence that is perhaps an inheritance from the 19th century when a perception of pre-revolutionary France was one of refinement and taste while post-revolutionary France represented a decline in culture and values with the advent bourgeoisie. Crucially, the detail imagined as a type of fragmentary ornament capable of picturing a past or lost time envisions an article that is ripe with meaning, emotion and mood. It also echoes notions of the completion and negation enacted through supplementary forms as well as the cosmic organizations available through tiny accessories. The detail regardless of its destination, disposition or

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45 Historically the timeframe for this period spans the 15th-18th century and nominates the French kingdom under the Valois and Bourbon dynasties, however the term is often used to evoke the late 18th century and specifically recalls the years just before the French revolution.
46 Ibid., 10.
47 Ibid., 10.
discriminations, is conceptualized as a synecdoche of life-style and a disseminator of atmosphere. Groups, complete with their emotional resonances, are conjured and presented through the ornament of detail.

Watteau

Soft pastel palettes, amorphous billows and sensuous curving lines characterize rococo painting. Scenes of love, nature, amorous encounters and light-hearted entertainment are its usual themes. The works of Watteau are recognized as examples of rococo painting and he is sited as the father of the fête galante, a genre emblematic of the ancien régime. This genre depicts small groups of characters enjoying and entertaining each other in landscape settings. The characters are anonymous and the landscapes do not depict actual places. Rococo paintings are attributed with a highly ornamental style, and often dismissed in terms of their lack of subject matter. Watteau’s œuvre in particular is discussed with an emphasis placed on its mysterious and poetic aspects. Norman Bryson suggests this is in reaction to the “semantic vacuum” of Watteau’s paintings. An effect in contrast to paintings that have a fullness of information in the form of story, gestures or physical expressiveness that is in a sense predetermined and fixed in terms of viewer reaction.48 Paintings of well-known religious themes are examples of works that contain definite information. Watteau’s images on the other hand maintain open-endedness.49 Bryson writes, “Watteau’s strategy is to release enough discourse for the viewer to begin to verbalize the image, but not enough in quantity or specificity for the image to be exhausted”.50

Suellen Diaconoff engages with Watteau’s paintings and the fête galante in particular as an eighteenth-century reprisal of the notion of gradus amoris. She explains gradus amoris as a, “proposition from medieval rhetoric which maintains that every erotic episode will follow a definite order from viscus (sighting), to alloquium (dialogue), to contactus (touch), to osculum (kiss), and ultimately to factum (deed)”.

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49 Ibid., 58-88.
50 Ibid., 58-88.
The Embarkation for Cythera certainly incorporates aspects of this inevitable course for love and lovers. She frames Watteau’s works as expressions of desire and writes, “Desire is, of course the substructure of all social discourse, as portrayed in the arts of the period, and desire is both the wish to meld with another and, importantly, the longing to actualize— provisionally perhaps, momentarily at least—the self by projection and extension of the self’s boundaries. Paradoxically, then, the objective of desire is to lose and to find oneself, and therein lies its potential both for humor and for insights into human psychology”.52 Gradus amoris, although explicated in the terms of erotic love, follows a line of expression for human connection that includes both loss and recovery similar to Anzieu’s notion of the group carrying out the work of aufheben. It specifically pertains to intimate romantic relationships, which Anzieu excludes from this task, and utilizes a set of physical actions to activate its containing ‘skin’. In this manner a physical gesture becomes a type of augmenting, accessorizing or ornamenting device that actualizes another entity. A small earthly sequence of movements articulated as and through performance that joins the boundaries between bodies.

Catherine Cusset apprehends Watteau’s Cythera to be a work in the tradition of libertinage. She explains libertinage as “the sole literary and artistic movement that speaks of nothing but pleasure”.53 Libertine novels were written in a philosophical context of resistance to metaphysics, taking the materialist argument that the aim of human life was to seek pleasure and so focusing on pleasure and the body.54 The pleasure is not only one of “sensual satisfaction; it also includes mental pleasure, all feelings that lead to a happiness of the moment. What matters is the opposition between the solid, lasting values favored by traditional morals and the superficial and ephemeral, yet powerful feelings described by the libertine novelists”.55 She devotes the first chapter of her book No Tomorrow: The Ethics of Pleasure in the French Enlightenment to Watteau’s Cythera and the fête galante genre, describing these paintings as forerunners to an eighteenth-century literature of libertinage. In contrast to desire, Watteau’s works are discussed within terms of pleasure, much as they were

52 Ibid., 259.
54 Ibid., 2.
55 Ibid., 9.
in their own times. Cusset concedes that pleasure never had “good press”\textsuperscript{56} and quotes Roland Barthes perception that it is in fact policed. “Futility and/or guilt, pleasure is either idle or vain, a class notion or an illusion… Pleasure is continually disappointed, reduced, deflated in favor of strong, noble values: Truth, Death, Progress, Struggle, Joy, etc. Its victorious rival is Desire: we are always being told about desire, never about pleasure”.\textsuperscript{57} Cusset does not attribute pleasure as the “meaning” of Watteau’s painting rather she conceptualizes pleasure as a rejection of meaning, as a disruption to the viewer who longs for a coherent interpretation. She argues that by choosing ambiguity and rejecting moral lesson, Watteau makes what is essentially an ethical gesture. The unresolved contradictions in Watteau’s paintings open a space of playful ambiguity and irony that is the basis for an ethics of pleasure, where “man must learn to accept the lightness of meaning”.\textsuperscript{58}

In \textit{Watteau’s Painted Conversations}, Mary Vidal argues for a limit to the discourse surrounding the works of Watteau. She suggests these works be interrogated within light of their historical context and so directs attention to the act of conversation within Watteau’s paintings. She notes the conversational arts were highly prized during the eighteenth century and refers to Michel Foucault’s insight that a fundamental change occurred in seventeenth-century epistemology. Knowledge, once conceived of as God-given or pre-existent, begins to be viewed as an act of human organization and creation. Speech and knowledge come to be seen as a process of development within the social sphere. She also suggests a return to an investigation of the images themselves and Watteau’s repeated motif of small subsets of figures engaged in “graceful conversational movements”.\textsuperscript{59} Vidal argues that a cultural distance from this age of conversation has left us as modern viewers unable to engage with conversation as the subject of Watteau’s paintings.\textsuperscript{60}

Diaconoff, Cusset and Vidal’s valid and varied propositions support Norman Bryson’s term semantic vacuum, which references the contingent and ambiguous

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{58} Cusset, \textit{No Tomorrow: The Ethics of Pleasure in the French Enlightenment}, 41.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 1-9.
narrative that is a characteristic element of Watteau’s paintings. This quality does not mean the picture is resistant to elaboration but it does mean one speculation will not put an end to others. Even Vidal, although she calls for a limit to discourse, concedes that the lack of closure in Watteau’s paintings elicits commentary more insistently than other images in art. The beauty of Watteau’s semantic vacuum is in the generosity he affords his viewer. One can pick up on details and rather than be directed to forgone conclusions, this gesture persuades his audience to actively build their own interpretation. In this way the paintings are not only ornamental but also function as ornaments in regard to their capacity to generate an unlimited number of resonances. Paradoxically they picture decorum yet request metamorphosis, encompassing the full ornamental spectrum.

My attention is drawn to Watteau’s depiction of the group. His groups are anonymous and imaginary yet they portray qualities and emotions that are distinctly human and earthly. I’m captivated by the figure of Gilles, costumed as Pierrot although remaining unmasked. The beautiful youthful face sprouts a five-o’clock shadow, a bodily detail that locates this figure between worlds of artifice and actuality. Watteau’s figurative ensembles range from troupes of actors, to groups of soldiers or small social gatherings. The paintings reflect Watteau’s engagement with Flemish and Dutch traditions of the early seventeenth century, a genre that depicts contemporary sociability as an end in itself rather than an allegory of other themes. Yet he brings to the surface ideas of creation, artifice and construction in relation to human sociability that the older traditions do not establish.

Formal aspects visually inaugurate the group as contingent and constructing. These include a handing of paint that is sketchy and loose but never strident, building an overall cohesiveness for the surface of the image that retains a shimmering contingency. The figures drape themselves across the picture plane in classic rococo arabesques. However, these are not the ample, fleshy garlands found in images from earlier painters such as Rubens, these figures display a distinct lightness of appearance that suggests an immateriality to their presence. Material details of dress and costume figure predominantly in Watteau’s images but these are executed with a painterly treatment of cloth that seems unstudied. Strokes of colour are overlaid with twirls of lace, while highlights and movements in fabric are depicted through squiggly
lines. Large swathes of cloth billow out from bodies, with Watteau utilizing the fabric of each character’s costume to form a colourful and rhythmic join between figures. The materiality of dress literally describes a group that is communicating and connected, linked through costume visually and socially. Figures form associations through minimal and intimate gestures of contact like handholding or the gentle and attentive turn of a head to depict listening and engagement between characters. Characters are often pictured sitting on the ground collected together in poses of relaxed and informal social gatherings, assemblies that are provisional and spontaneous by their very nature. There is an absence of an elaborate architecture of entitativity rather group-ness is built from the ephemera of dress and gesture.

Watteau also divests his groups of the dramatics of an event. There is a softening of pictorial action and a type of fuzziness surrounds the goings-on. Watteau’s groups are pictured playing and participating in relaxed entertainments, mucking around or just hanging out in daily life. It is interesting to note that Watteau’s fête galante was first accepted into the academy in 1717, two years after the death of Louis XIV. Historical writings depict the French court decamping from the palace at Versailles and returning to their private homes in Paris. The layers of ritual and protocol that distinguished life at Versailles were quickly abandoned and replaced by the more relaxed expectations of a life conducted within intimate spaces. Perhaps Watteau was alluding to this easing of social structures with his depictions of characters enjoying and relaxing in un-manicured, rather wayward gardens. With this conceptualization, the group is presented as a process susceptible to change, a collective that is continually reorganized by the social context within which it is embedded.

Other Artists, Other Works

The articulation of the group as an ornamental technique of the surface, frames the exterior of the group as a critical space for thinking about the group. I’ll point out that this is not a manifesto but an artistic strategy for establishing an openness for pictured figures that allows them to continue as ideas. This continuation is an essential characteristic of the group-ornament. The surface of the group’s body, rather than stopping thought or answering questions, procures more thought and more questions.
Gilles Deleuze makes a distinction between ‘the cinema of action’ and ‘the cinema of the body’ in his book *Cinema 2 The Time Image*.

The action image presupposes a space in which ends, obstacles, means, subordinations, the principle and the secondary, predominances and loathings are distributed: a whole space which can be called ‘hodological’. But the body is initially caught in a quite different space, where disparate sets overlap and rival each other, without being able to organize themselves according to sensory-motor schemata. They fit over each other, in an overlapping of perspectives which means that there is no way to distinguish them even though they are distinct and also incompatible. This is space before action, always haunted by a child, or by a clown, or by both at once. It is a pre-hodological space, like a *fluctuatio animi* which does not point to an indecision of spirit, but to an undecidability of the body. The obstacle does not, as in the action-image, allow itself to be determined in relation to goals and means which would unify the set, but is dispersed in ‘a plurality of ways of being present in the world’, of belonging to sets, all incompatible and yet coexistent.  

One notion contained within Deleuze’s ‘cinema of the body’ is the dispersal of the figure across a field of performance that privileges gestures, postures and attitudes over concrete character and plot development. In this type of cinema the filmmaking process prioritizes performance and the act of showing over the communication of narrative causality. The film’s primary point of entry is through the performance of form rather than the relaying of content. Two directors that prioritize form rather than narrative as a method to study the complexity of groups and sociability are Yorgos Lanthimos and Kelly Reichardt. Both Lanthimos and Reichardt deal thematically with small groups that are fringe dwellers, fragile collectives undergoing a process of change due to greater social circumstances. These filmmakers develop nuanced and enigmatic atmospheres for their groups, and although their themes and visual moods differ in tone to mine, nevertheless these directors primarily coordinate group form through attention to the group’s surface and so can be identified as directors who articulate or amplify the notion of group through its exteriority and as an exterior presence.

Yorgos Lanthimos is a Greek director who collaborates with a dedicated troupe of actors, drawing attention to a physical dramaturgy that takes its reference from dance

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and performance art. He treats the group as a ‘potentiality’ through the enactment of a type of ‘performance exercise’. In Lanthimos’s films, groups are often depicted performing actual exercises or playing at various physical movements that are slightly unusual such as the cardiopulmonary resuscitation procedures in *Dogtooth*. He links his characters through techniques of the body that are pedestrian yet recognizable cultural institutions in themselves. An example of this is the individualistically sonic yet communal dance of the characters wearing headphones in *The Lobster*. Often these instructions are slightly misapprehended and in this way a critique of culture is enacted through the body’s physicality. Lanthimos’s group-body is manifested through its acquisition or addition of a manner or style whose referent is physical practice. These sequences are assembled as loose chains of cinematic events and often communicate a dark physical comedy. For Lanthimos the physical performance of the mundane acts as a means of social discovery and as a way to explore the micropolitics of everyday life. His emphasis on the rote activity and movement of his characters shifts attention towards the visual or formal aspects of his groups and destabilizes a cohesive and subjective narrative reading. Shared techniques of the body operate as uncontestable linking devices in Lanthimos’s oeuvre, but these gestures often raise further questions regarding the ‘nature’ of the group rather than answering them.

Kelly Reichardt builds her films by attending to the atmospheres and attitudes of the groups portrayed as much as to plot. Her films deal with wanderers and searchers moving through landscapes from which they are disenfranchised. This can be due to the fact that the group is lost, as in *Meek’s Cutoff* or socially at risk, as in *Wendy and Lucy*. Relationships between people, dogs and landscapes are built through a careful attention to detail. Reichardt allows the camera to slow down and linger, obtaining a reserved and patient pace for the visual rhythms of her images. She utilizes an observational method in preparation for her productions that remains evident in her final product. She describes a film practice where she carefully selects a location and then hangs out in the space taking photographs of the people, what they are wearing and how they interact.\(^\text{62}\) Reichardt transposes these observations to her stories with a

limited amount of fuss and an economy of style, which results in beautifully restrained and enigmatic moving pictures. These gentle and deliberately observational compositions provide the principle access to her characters. The delicacy and fragility of Reichardt’s groups remind me of the works of Watteau. Both depict figures that seem as though they could detach from their landscapes or dematerialize at any moment, visual correlates of precarious societies.

Lanthimos shapes a robust and comically surreal atmosphere for his groups while Reichardt’s groups seem to emanate from a fragile social reality. This, however, is just a point of view. Lanthimos refers to the fact that non-Greek people usually point out his surrealism but in reality the concerns, attitudes and negotiations of his characters are only absurd if one is not subjected to Greek culture. My Cypriot husband, who finds Lanthimos’s films a little close to the bone, corroborates this comment. So now one group’s surrealism is another’s social reality. The research identifies Watteau, Lanthimos and Reichardt as artists who portray groups not as portraits of individuals, but as expressions and explorations of sociability. Importantly for the project these artists’ conception of sociability includes notions of dynamism, instability and self-production. These works engage with sociability as a process. They escape the need to expose a fixed historical, symbolic or psychological reading and instead utilize an articulation of surface to form the group. To emphasize social cohesion, these artists direct attention to gesture, body positioning and costume, while faces, conversation and specific identities are obscured. The images are concerned with the intimacy of social interchange and the form it takes, as well as the manipulation of form that social interchange requires. Narrative is attenuated and surface becomes the primary method to both explore and join figures; encouraging the audience to question and ruminate upon groups and the pathways through which they present.

This project began with thinking about the surface of groups. Noticing that they have an ornamental quality, a quality that remains on the outside and although one can move past this exterior through interpretation, there is no need to go beneath to experience the original force and magic of the group. It exists in its exterior. It exists in the facts of its presentation. This research is instigated within the realm of visual art and culminates in the pictured group however the distinctions between actual groups
and imaged groups are infinitely blurred with all groups in a sense operating on an imaginary level. The significance of this research resides in the amplification of the notion of the group-ornament and moves between realms of the actual and the imagined with freedom. This is in fact one of the conclusions of the research. When I began this topic I was very concerned with mixing the real with the imagined. I was worried about using real groups as reference for my ideas, that it would somehow implicate the sociological aspects of this project of which I knew very little and had limited time to research and address. Of course working with cameras further complicates the notion of real and imaginary and I was loath to get stuck moving down those avenues. However working closely with ideas about groups and ornament as well as ideas surrounding photography, cinema and social *mise en scène*, allowed me to understand that groups and ornaments exist in a social code of arrangement predicated upon presentation and display. Whether the group-ornament and its world are actual or fictive is not critical to its exposure as a subject.

It is especially within the idea of social *mise en scène* that I found the confidence to begin to really work with moving image and construct the group-ornament. I was already building images using gesture, props, figures and landscape but felt unsure as to my technique. I was ‘doing’ my practice but I did not have a clear understanding or grasp of it as a process. I understood the concept of *mise en scène*, that broad and contested phrase imported from the theatre, which literally means everything placed in the scene but felt that there was a finer description for the aesthetic space the research was attempting to build. This *mise en scène* had a particular flavour that resided both in the imaginary and in the social. Social *mise en scène* is a relatively recent concept in film analysis, emerging in force during the early 21st century. Adrian Martin hypothesizes social *mise en scène* as a “detour via reality”. It depicts situations or arrangements that are both cinematic and social in the sense that they are recognizable in the world beyond cinema. He writes,

> Whether as material for cinema or as the stuff of the quotidian world, certain, specific rules are involved, and sometimes explicitly invoked: habits, rituals, prohibitions great and small... What I (taking the lead from other commentators) am calling here social *mise en scène* has a character which often passes under conscious attention or reflection in

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daily life. We know—or rather, we somehow learn, through a complex process of transmission that is particular to every culture and society—how to ‘go about our business’... We might say many movies begin from the moment when these rules and conventions come unstuck from their smooth routine, either dramatically or comically (or both at once). 64

Martin enlists Francois Albera’s speculation that social *mise en scène* came to the fore as the old romantic notion of the director as a person who essentially creates cinema as a personal code of expression was being eroded. 65 He notes, “The force and novelty of the concept of social *mise en scène* derives from its premise of not beginning from these Romantic metaphors of blank canvas, white page, granite block or ‘pregnant’ film set. It starts, rather, from the simple but powerful idea that cinema works with a particular type of loose but definite material: the codes and rules of sociality...with bodies and environments as its primary material... (Cinema) takes into itself the facts long recognized by sociologists of every stripe: that the social world itself is already relatively strictly organized”. 66 I have often felt that the material of the cinema is exactly this: bodies and environments. Not only in the product or the moving image that eventuates but also in the location, crew, actors, props, costumes etc. that assemble to create this picture. Films that include the process of movie making in their content as a meta-narrative device are referred to as ‘breaking the fourth wall’. The act of moviemaking is framed within the film itself, a collision of spaces that speaks to the display within display effect that occurs during filming. Stills photography definitely speaks to the extra-social-creative space that is the unique habitat of the filmmaking process and to the fact that filmmaking is undeniably a collaborative event.

Martin describes social *mise en scène* as having a character that often passes under conscious attention. With *mise en scène* in general this is precisely the point, to build a material environment that not only reinforces or corroborates the narrative but also to build these spaces so that the players or actions within them seem natural and fitting. Watteau, Lanthimos and Reichardt make pictures that are constructed using an

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64 Martin, *Mise en Scène and Film Style: From Classical Hollywood to New Media Art*, 129.
exploration and amplification of this social character as their point of origin. This is the space of the group-ornament in the fact that to draw attention to society as a type of artistic material, one has to return to the artistic materiality of society. To give pictorial attention to the techniques and performances of the group involves an awareness coupled with the ability to register the constructed and supplementing nature of society itself. Society, which is often experienced with the status of the natural, now appears somewhere between the manufactured and the real. It appears artful. To point out the ornament of this orchestration through *mise en scène* also resituates the body within a material world filled with dynamic, communicating and parallel things. *Group-ness* now becomes the practice that is worked with, worked upon and presented. The methods are varied as evidenced by the different approaches of the artists nominated but what is represented is the group as an aesthetic form.
PART FOUR: The Eccentric Surface

This last section deals with the practical works of the project and returns to its original question: *how can the group be articulated as ornament?* It begins by addressing the artworks made during this project and discusses the overall strategies and ideas that informed these works as a whole. This is followed by a short discussion of each work in particular. The section is titled the eccentric surface because it best describes the visual space that was being procured for the works. The research was concerned with building an ornamental space through carefully placed details or by focusing on artifacts in the landscape that did not overwhelm the image with an overall surface pattern. At the same time these inclusions had to extend their visual and conceptual reach in order to infuse the image with motion, pattern or information that built a type of ornamental expressivity for the surface. The research embarked on a series of visual experiments that looked for and tested ways of drawing attention to multiple resonances and points of entry for the group as opposed to a central locus. The word eccentric literally means away from the centre and so become a useful point of reference for dealing with these works compositionally and conceptually.

The ethos of the Rococo could be understood as an attitude committed to eccentricity in the fact that it signaled a movement away from the authorititative or centralizing position of the Baroque. Its signature *rocaille* detail visually points to the expression of a de-centred imaginative space, as does its celebration of pleasure and play. Watteau’s groups are portrayed without central authority, depicted in the activity of creating themselves. Their position undeniably eccentric according to the terms of Sloterdijk who conjures the eccentric as souls, “drifting in an absolute outside, neither capable nor in need of rescue and only at home in self-relationships and their additions from the environment”.¹ Ornament itself can be conceptualized as an eccentric object, its banishment ejecting it from central discourse for over a century. And so on. In a sense the word eccentric could be replaced with the word enigmatic but technically eccentric means not placed centrally. Because the research was dealing on a practical level with details of assembly and composition, eccentric proved to be the more considered adjective. Its meaning also migrates into notions of

¹ Sloterdijk, *Spheres Volume II: Globes Macrospherology*, 118.
an unconventional or strange appearance which preserves the unfamiliar or unclear associations that originally attended the word group.

*Becoming Ornament* experiments with the construction of images that speak to a perception of the ornamental qualities in small groups. These qualities have persistently presented themselves to me and span both the forms of actual social groupings and the social groups imaged through film, photography and painting. The artful and imaginary nature of all forms of figurative groups has been in my consciousness since earliest memory. Perhaps the legacy of a peripatetic childhood, watching and viewing the choreography of landscapes and people, come and go. It would be false to ascribe a defining practical beginning to this project other than the fact that some decisions were made early in its course through trial and error. The first was a shift away from using painting and photography to build a group-ornament. The research was falling into the trap of illustrating an idea rather than experimenting towards it. Photography remained as an adjunct to filmmaking in the form of stills photography but it was no longer used as a stand-alone medium. The second was the use of moving image to explore an articulation of the group as ornament. Moving image proved particularly successful in shaping the group-ornament because it allowed me to manipulate the surface of the works towards ornament at different stages during their formation. Considerations such as colour palette, composition, movement, highlights, lowlights, areas that are built up or knocked back etc. were of primary concern during both pre and post production. I approached the materiality of the screen-image through a practice that is firmly anchored in painting, so in this way incorporated painting not as a medium but as an expanded practice.

Each picture is in effect a series of choices placed in proximity to each other. The decisions were made over time and usually began with site location, then costume and prop construction, casting, crew and cameras. I coordinated these items and players, organized transport to the site and from there, allowed the action to take place relatively freely. Out in the field we worked as a team. The footage was determined by the response of everybody and everything to the conditions of the day. This is not to say there wasn’t direction involved in this process. I often made multiple visits to the sites to understand approximately where to situate the cameras as well as to sort out the time of day that would give me the right type of light. I usually had my crew
booked in with a rough shooting schedule and then waited for the weather report to determine the exact day of the shoot. The research method to coordinating the elements in the picture frame utilized ornament as a default technique or device to think through the many layers of choice involved in these images. The decisions range from what sort of fabric to use in the costumes to what type of transition to use in the edit. I looked to the ornamental qualities of trees and shrubs and the attributes that are considered in choosing landscape plants in order to visualize the characteristics for the groups and the images as a whole. These qualities are growth rate, plant size, shape, habit, foliage type, flowers, fruits, bark, height, leaf shape and leaves. This list acted as a type of roll call of qualities living things display, which are objectively understood to confer an ornamental value upon them.

All of the works were developed with an emphasis on the natural world and organic shapes. The research was exploring these shapes and movements and their effectiveness in imparting an ornamental mood for the group and the picture in general. On site clearly geometric shapes and man-made constructions such as buildings or fences were avoided in order to dislocate setting as a method to navigate or make sense of the pictures. If these structures were at the location, the shots were framed to avoid their inclusion. Every once in a while a stray artifact would appear, like the speed boat zooming over the top of the frame in The Wiggles. The film sets for this project were purposefully organized to remain slightly open to capture these happenstances. This was in order to test unpredictability as a method to add playfulness, lightness and pleasure to the images. The use of exterior spaces and actual locations, unrehearsed physical activities, children, babies and dogs added to the unpredictability on set.

The research was seeking to create figures that ultimately had no specific identity or story attached to them other than an exterior enlivened and made entitative through a technique of ornament. Ornament in this case treated as a family of practices whose original concern is the articulation of surface. In this way decoration, detail, style, gesture and manner are released from the constraint of strict definition or particular criteria to an instinctual logic that recognizes these types of things as sharing characteristics and belonging together when handled as surface modifiers. What sorts of ornamental applications would enable the merging of figures with each other, as
well as the merging of carriers with their adornment? And how to make the group an event that remained upon its own surface?

One of the key elements in post-production was to maintain the complexity of the project and the complexity of the proposition of the group-ornament. The research utilized post-production techniques such as jump cuts, repeat frames, split screens and comments off camera as a method to open up the surface of the works to thinking. The research was experimenting with ways to present not only the group that was formed specifically for the camera but also the dynamism in the notion of group and the fact that the crew shooting the piece could also be imagined as occupying the picture plane. Allowing the viewer access to more than the ‘official’ footage was tested as an invitation to the audience to add their own thoughts/selves to the picture. The research was looking for ways to build a group-ornament that retained notions of construction, instability, flux and inclusiveness at many levels. It sought to avoid seamless visual and sonic totalities and instead looked for ways to include the contingency that was experienced during the course of the project and express this through a multifaceted and dimensional surface-scape. Post-production techniques that in a sense broke the surface were tested as methods to break down boundaries between audience, crew and actors. Suggesting the aesthetic experience, the arrangement, the mood, the environment and the atmosphere that is the group-ornament has many incarnations. Positioning it as a complex and dimensional surface-scape that can develop at multiple sites simultaneously.
Sheila

Sheila was made towards the end of the first year of the project. The project had been experimenting with group building activities using photography. These works were directed and organized by linking the figures through shared bodily positioning such as asking participants to sit cross-legged in a circle. The research also experimented with stringing the figures together using ribbons, jewelry grade ball chain and earrings, working to build a group where the relationship between figures was made materially evident. This was a very simple and useful way into the practical component of the project and allowed decisions to be made regarding the types of items that would be worked with to test and build a perception of entitativity. The research established the main organizing elements for the compositions to be a combination of setting, figure and costume. Once these were distinguished as the materials, the research turned to the question of how to bring out the ornamental qualities in these items as well dismantle the boundaries between these items and open the picture up to a less directed reading? During these shoots multiple images were taken and I found the images taken just before and after the orchestrated event proved the most interesting both compositionally and theoretically. These photographs pictured the group as a dynamic form, banding together and then dispersing. The images had movement. I decided to test if moving image would better
capture or highlight this dynamism and so moved from photography to motion picture with *Sheila*.

Right away it was understood that moving image, if successful, would bridge form with content. The temporal nature of groups would be articulated through an artistic media whose sound and vision ultimately necessitates a handling or management of time. *Sheila* concentrates on transforming the pictorial space into an overall surface. I was thinking about the paintings of Edouard Vuillard, his ornament accomplished by a visual collapse between figures and fabric. The paintings and their characters subsumed by the all-encompassing decorations of printed textiles. Vuillard’s works pointed to an engagement with surface materiality as a method to accentuate the ornamental in images. I had been researching groups and ornaments to establish working definitions for each but at this point the ornament and the group remained separate. *Sheila* allowed the research to situate these two things in proximity to each other in physical space. I also let go of the ‘tie signs’ I was trying to accomplish in the beginning of the year and focused on methods to abstract the figures and join them to the materiality of the landscape in a flattened jigsaw of colour and pattern.

*Sheila* started with the idea to envision a group from a bird’s eye view to test whether this camera angle would emphasize the formal qualities and shapes of the grouped figure rather than personality. Because the work was recorded using a static aerial shot, I decided to develop a linking device that was dug into the ground. This would then become the centre of the composition when the image was viewed on a screen. This was to push the boundaries of what types of things could be construed as ornament and explore Mihaela Critico’s proposition that specific intention could turn almost everything into ornament. The ornament in *Sheila* takes its inspiration from name necklaces that were popular in the 1970s. These necklaces spelt out the wearer’s name in cursive script with the script attached to a fine gold chain. The word Sheila was chosen because it is a both a first name and a collective noun for girls or young women in general. It has a slightly pejorative tone and is an Australian colloquialism. By writing the word in flowing decorative font, I hoped to reference the association between females and ornament. The word was dug into the ground and stuffed with votive candles. The group was formed through the activity of lighting these candles.
Sheila initiated a few working practices that continued to be utilized and developed during the course of the project. These were the operational procedures that tended to enliven the surface of the group/image. Although the works were dealing with form, these aspects made the works less formal in their attitude. Of course different works utilized different aspects of these procedures. The first technique was to stop forming the group through direct assembly. Sheila pointed to the fact that I could rely on some sort of group form taking shape in response to a given set of circumstances. In this way the group builds itself and remains open to a sociability developed with a modicum of freedom in response and adaptation to social, locational or spatial circumstances. This gives the first openness to the group. By openness I mean there is a casual or an impromptu feeling for the group. The second was that postures, gestures and figurative shapes were coordinated through shared actions. In this way a loose synchronization or choreography for the figures was developed through a technique of the body or action of the body. The crawling and crouching that the figures engaged in was procured by the action of lighting candles rather than directed by an outside authority. The third insight offered by Sheila was the incorporation of natural and ephemeral elements such as fire into works. These features visually stress that technique and material are used to construct the images and point to materiality as a device that is both poetic and logistic.
Sheila aligned itself very closely to the idea of social *mise en scène*. So closely in fact, that I received a message from a young woman enquiring if an image of the shoot I had posted on Facebook was an actual picture of her Aunt Sheila’s funeral. And had she somehow missed the event? In contrast *Short Birds* takes a step towards theatricality, play and costume. This piece was visually informed by echoes of the Rococo in order to convey frivolity and a mood of lightheartedness. The work began with the construction of popcorn hats and proceeded from there. I was developing a technique where an item such as a costume or camera angle initiated a series of actions that culminated into a work. I didn’t quite know where a project would lead but every time a decision had to be made, I made it keeping surface, texture, colour and movement at the forefront of my mind. In this way qualities that push an image towards a feeling of lushness or surface sensuality were prioritized. Ornament became a type of default setting. The flexibility in this type of practice reminded me of a ribbon unfurling and rippling out across a picture plane. The skill did not reside in geometries, mathematics, hard lines, storyboards or controlled outcomes; the skill was in an ability to consciously go with the flow.

The hats were constructed as directional objects. I’d been looking at the tall, ornate, golden headdress of classical Thai temple dancers and how these headdresses accentuated and modified the movements of their carriers, pointing them towards
heaven. Because the project was exploring ideas associated with play and frivolity, everything to do with earthly occupations rather than divine, I made the headdresses out of wire and popcorn. These were the materials at hand that pushed ornament towards the cheap and cheerful rather than the sacred. The irregular or butterfly shape of the kernels offered a rococo-esque and perfectly eccentric surface. Once constructed, the headdresses sat a bit motionless so feathers were added on top for movement. At this point the costume began to acquire a bird-like resonance, which was reinforced by placing the costumed characters in an old gum tree and having them groom and feed each other in the manner of birds. There is a sub-genre of comedic ornament, often associated with the Rococo but stretching back to medieval times, which parodies human behavior by depicting animals taking on the activities and attitudes of humans.\(^2\) *Short Birds* inverts this situation but arrives at the same comedic vision. Some bird-likeness was achieved through costume, location and the actions of the characters but post-production refined and amplified the bird-ness. The movements of the characters were sped up to twice their natural rate and the birds appeared to pop into the tree and then ‘burn’ out of the picture.

With *Short Birds* the research experiments with the group as a type of ornamental applique. The limbs of the figures are intertwined as they pop into the tree as a dual entity. The research found that grouping figures together fundamentally establishes an ornamental quality for characters. The relationship between figures becomes the primary depiction, deprioritizing the quest for personality or psychology that often seems of primary concern when confronted with a sole character. This opens the picture to a whole series of questions that in a sense remain unanswerable or at least ruminative. Information becomes dispersed across figures, which deflects as well as sets up the pursuit for a coherent conceptual resolution. The operative demands of ornament are here.

The figures sudden appearance is physically unnatural and comic. It also points to their status as a superimposition or a supplementary accessory for the tree. This work experiments with the notion of *Staffage*. In German this word literally means accessory or decoration. It can be used as a general term for any figures in a work,\(^2\) Alessandra Zamperini, *Ornament And The Grotesque: Fantastical Decoration from Antiquity to Art Nouveau* (Thames & Hudson, 2008), 231.
even when they are the main subject, and as a descriptive term for figures to which no specific identity or story is attached. These figures are accessories to the scene, included for compositional or decorative reasons. They are literally additions that add life to the work. In the nineteenth century patterns for hundreds of different Staffage figures were published for painters to cut and paste.\(^3\) Much like the hand drawn figures of Watteau used as recurring templates throughout his paintings\(^4\), these patterns are examples of figures unmoored from their original surroundings. Utilized as free-floating visual motifs that lack narrative subject matter, they occupy a logic of appearance that is primarily ornamental.

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**Birds of a Feather**


This piece presented itself as my crew and I were returning home from the *Short Birds* shoot. We had packed up our gear and were heading home when we drove past a large burnt-out paddock. The ground was singed black with the entire surrounding grasslands ringed in black burnt-out hills. The landscape presented the most beautifully composed monochromatic setting to offset the costumed figures. We

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\(^4\) Vidal, *Watteau’s Painted Conversations*, 127.
hopped out of the car and set up the shot. It was decided the characters would walk
from the background to the fore of the shot, taking advantage of a slight dip in the
landscape to visually disappear and then reappear. Just as we organized ourselves in
the field and began shooting a few fat plops of rain fell. At this point the cameraman
increased the frame rate to sixty frames per second, which had the effect of slowing
down the motion in this work. This slowing not only stressed the constructed or
produced nature of this image but also the shared materiality of the objects displayed.
The figures, landscape and rain achieving an equivalency with no single feature
taking priority due to the motion of each of these items being equally underscored by
the frame rate. The figures, through their synchronized movements as they struggle to
hold onto their headdresses and run through the rain, enact a choreography that
appears to be one of pure body mechanics as opposed to instruction. The landscape’s
majestic presence displayed, as the camera pulls back into a wide shot. And the rain,
which performs as an overall surface texture, unifying the scene in a decorative
rhythm both temporal and haptic.

*Birds of a Feather* includes a complex set of directional movements in its composition
that highlight the physicality of the image. The first is the horizontality of the
landscape, which sets up motion across the picture plane. The second is the movement
of the figures from the background to the foreground. Their movement amplified as
directional by the adornment of the feathered headdresses and the flowing robes. They
shape the image with regards to dimensional and temporal space as well as
supplementary presence. The third factor is the rain, which forms a downward
trajectory but has the effect of spreading across the surface of the image. I imagine the
rain as a veil or a net that stitches together and amplifies the cohesiveness of all things
placed within the *mise en scène*. Of course the besieged landscape and the drenched
characters, their soggy hats and wet t-shirt type costumes, adds to a physically
arduous yet joyful scene. The figures and landscape share a common fate of deluge.
Campbell ranked common fate the single most effective organizing principle in
evoking a group as entitative. *Birds of a Feather* sets up an arena for ornament that
allows it to move between spaces. Ornament can be identified in the adornments of
the figures, in the shared movements of the figures, in the monochromatic landscape,
in the surface texture of the rain, or in the image in its entirety.
The inspiration for *Milk* came from Marcel Mauss’ notion that the body is in possession of multiple techniques such as walking, spitting, swimming, sleeping and eating. He proposed that although we rarely consider these as anything other than natural, they are in fact transmitted modes of action or techniques of the body. He goes on to remark that they vary from society to society with each society having its own special habits and each technique its own form. In this way the body is imagined as equipping or adorning itself through a technique or performance that modifies its surface. Physical actions become a type of ornamental veneer superimposed upon the body in order to assemble a social body. Mauss’ ‘techniques of the body’ support an understanding of the artfulness and the socialness of human movement. I especially appreciate the fact these movements are not extraordinary or spectacular movements; rather their artfulness is recognized within the activities of daily living. This was a value pursued throughout the project in order to highlight the group as an aesthetic form that takes shape through a handling of the materials that are literally at hand.

*Milk* is composed of a series of figures that swim into the picture frame and spit milk. Once more the research elaborates the materiality of the moving image and questions how to manipulate this so the primary resonance for the group remains at its surface.

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presentation. The compositional concern was with the shapes and patterns the group would form. White milk, green water and flesh-coloured bodies formed the palette for this work. The swimming and spitting were used in direct reference to Mauss’ ‘techniques of the body’ as a type of ornamental exposition. Of course milk has other bodily connotations ranging from sperm to breast milk, but nothing ever escapes as a technique of the body according to Mauss. His list extensive and citing such diverse occupations as climbing, birthing, rubbing, washing, soaping, normal and abnormal sexual acts and so on and so forth. In *Milk* the patterns are formed through human movement. The water takes shape in response to the swimmers. The body takes shape in the act of swimming and spitting. The milk projects through space and then forms swirling patterns due to surface tensions. These movements and the group are put through a series of crisp jump cuts in post-production. This was to offset the flowing nature of swimming, milk and water with the visual staccato of a jump cut. *Milk* experiments with building ornamental sensations in both pre and post production. It also explores building a group through shards of footage to express the constructed and fleeting nature of togetherness.
Milk originated not only in the idea of bodily techniques but also in the question of costume. The body is both a surface and a container, which means it has the potential to be extended, modified and imagined through its exterior and its interior. The research experiments with the notion of costume. It questions what types of things can be utilized as costume or bodily enhancements other than items confined to the realm of clothing. The costume in Milk is the milk. In this way the costume is incorporated into the body and speaks to the skin as both a surface and (with reference to Anzieu) as a type of arch-container. The milk-costume bridges the inside with the outside. The Wigglers continued an exploration of costume. This work began with the Zen Chi exercise machine as a type of external costume or bodily addition that has the capacity to direct the movement of the figures. I experimented with this machine to see what sort of movement could be extracted from it. I stood on it, lay in it and basically put it through its paces. I decided to expand upon the side-to-side motion it perpetrated on its occupants with reference to building relationships between things situated side-by-side in the picture plane.

As stated earlier, this piece works with the Deleuzean notion of becoming. Key to this piece is the idea that the figures and objects are primarily defined by the spaces and
situations they occupy together. I concentrated on maintaining an equivalency for all items in the picture plane by literally situating them parallel to each other. The figures are composed in relationship to other members in the group, to the dog, to the rocks, to the exercise machines and to the landscape in general. The view remains as a static medium shot and so diminishes a hierarchy of viewing. There are no camera antics. All action takes place within the medium frame, which is also known as the ‘normal’ frame. Of course this normal frame sits in juxtaposition to the tableaux depicted within it. *The Wigglers* is conceived as a fun and comedic piece. The wiggling machines ensured a lighthearted mood because they leveled the actions of the figures to a literally mindless movement. There is no drive or objective, no goal other than the constant wiggling. Even when the characters climb down from the machines and off the rocks, they simply mosey on down to the water for a casual look-see. Nothing much is happening. The image remains open to the full repertoire of ornament. Is it stripped of any apparent sense, emptied of semantic value or does it conceal a hidden message, celebratory or allegorical?

*The Wigglers* experiments with a few considerations that can be understood to operate within the context ornament. The first is the idea that the characters are interchangeable. The image is a composite of multiple takes. The camera remained in the exact same position for each take but the actors changed with each new sequence. This allowed the figures to be merged during post-production with transitions that were relatively smooth. The group and the group members are imagined and imaged as fungible and continuous in form. The piece also builds up the ornamental qualities in the image by using a location with a lot of sensual visual movement in its environmental objects. For example the rocks in *The Wigglers* are softly rounded mounds that form gentle slopes and frame the lively waves in the background. The rocks although inanimate have a visual voluptuousness that spreads across the image. The research for this piece focused on using objects that had patterns or movements that were plump and curvy to see if these inclusions evoked a mood of satiation, leisure and fullness for the group and for the image in general. Like *Birds of a Feather*, the ornament in *The Wigglers* is not contained in a single artifact but in multiple artifacts at play in the image as a whole.
The soundtrack was a gift from Laurent Distell. I had been researching an English version sung by Tony Bennett but the rights were only available for an outrageous fee. I noticed Sacha Distel sang the original version of *La Belle Vie* in French and that it remained the property of the composer’s family. Sacha’s son Laurent was more than happy to approve of the use of his father’s song. Ornament is thought to have migrated from language and the rhetorical arts. It is especially fitting that the lyrics to this song do not take priority over their utterance. I do not speak French but I can sense in the music and in the words a captivating vitality that has everything to do with feeling and nothing to do with explanation or directed meaning. The song’s timing, its rhythm and cadence builds a certain *je ne sais quoi* that sonically complements a pleasant if somewhat unusual *mise en scène*. *The Wigglers* decorative logic hovers around notions of the grotesque. These can be identified in its dream-like quality and its material world coloured with inventiveness and a subversion of imagery.

*Contouche/ Slow Contouche*

![Contouche/ Slow Contouche](image)


*Contouche* and *Slow Contouche* were made towards the end of the project. By this time the research had clearly established shared movement as one method to ascertain and present *group-ness* for figures in an image. I had been working with figures and body placement or blocking in all of the works using various devices like the exercise
machine in *The Wigglers* and the actions of spitting and swimming in *Milk*. These works for the most part utilized a midrange frame with the motion enacted and contained within this single continuous framing space. The next experiment dealt with figures that wandered across the picture plane as well as the use of multiple camera angles. This was to test what sorts of links could be built between both the characters and the landscape if they were framed by different shots whose final arrangement was determined during the edit. The research returned to the idea of Staffage to test the figures in long-range shot. Landscape made up the bulk of the image and the characters were introduced to act as ornamental extras or accessories to the scene. The site was a dam spillway, chosen for its linear rock formations. These formations have the appearance of being natural but are actually the result of blasting and so the whole landscape is a human artifact. We filmed in high summer at around eight o’clock in the evening. Photographers often call the period just before sunset the golden hour and I took full advantage of this natural light source to infuse the image with warm golden tones and soft shadows.

Due to the warm tones in the landscape the groups’ costume was made out of silver Mylar. I conducted a few experiments in my back garden with this material to see how a camera would deal with its reflective qualities in daylight. The fabric caused lens flare, which is a visual effect that builds a layer of amorphous materiality for images. The metallic costume also reflected the sky and in this way introduced both silver and blue into a largely yellowish palette. *Contouche* is the name given to a type of open and casual robe commonly worn by women in eighteenth century France. It is sometimes called a Watteau gown because his characters are often depicted dressed in this type of loose flowing garment. I based the costume for *Contouche* and *Slow Contouche* on this style, hoping to build a connection for my figures through a swirl of shared material that would flash and flare across the screen. Of course the space between the imagined and the imaged is mercurial and at times my costumed figures resembled beribboned baked potatoes more than elegant ethereal creatures.

Both *Contouche* and *Slow Contouche* articulate notions of directional ornament as well as accessories in motion due to the nature of the material used for the costume. Mylar, also known as a space blanket or emergency blanket, has an especially lightweight and low bulk. Its lightness allows it to billow around the body and swell
in the wind in a distinctively voluminous manner. The costume flows both with the body and catching in the breeze, as an extension of the body. In his 1930’s publication The Psychology of Clothes, J. C. Flügel nominates such effects in clothing as promoting the psychological illusion of confluence. He writes, “In this illusion, the mind fails to distinguish two things which under other circumstances are easily kept apart, and attributes to A what really belongs to B, so that A appears to undergo an increase”. Confluence speaks to the exchange between adornment and carrier and Flügel attributes these effects as, “undoubtedly of great importance in the production of the various satisfactions that are derived from clothes”. The perception extends both to the wearer and the viewer, accentuating the complex and multidirectional charges between adornment, mood, performance and bodily technique. Mylar’s puffiness and airiness also stands in direct contrast to the solidity of the rocks and the abstract forces of the water. Its thin plastic lagged slightly behind the bodies of its wearers causing a slight shift in tempo that resulted in a floating effect for the figures.

One of the distinct advantages of digital imaging is that it has an extended shooting duration due to the fact it is not a physical medium like film, so in effect one can now let the cameras roll. This has an impact on the way moving image can be approached. With Contouche I utilized this extended capability by capturing a series of multiple long takes during the shoot with the knowledge I would comb through these in post-production, then chop and cut and build the image again in the edit. Contouche was shot to take advantage of the editing suite by using multiple camera angles and cutaways. The footage was collected with a stress on the natural world and the movement of things in nature like the people, the water, and the grass. I was looking for pattern, both in the surface of items and in the timing of their movement, trying to extract visual rhythms that could be stitched together later on a computer timeline. Although I had the luxury of countless hours of footage due to digital media, this work especially utilizes a method that has its origin in experimental film. This approach to filmmaking is characterized by the fact that narrative is not its primary organizational feature. Instead, it accumulates, repeats, and contrasts images in

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7 Ibid., 36.
associative chains that suggest symbolic meanings or follow internal patterns. It focuses on experimenting with film form for aesthetic expression.\(^8\)

*Slow Contouche* filtered out from *Contouche* during the edit. Originally both pieces were to be joined in a split screen to test the different aspects of the group viewed in close-up and long shot. To question what expression these contrasting points of view lent the group as an entitative object and as an ornamental object. After viewing the footage it became clear that these images should remain separate. Because *Slow Contouche* is shot at an increased frame rate, the slowing of the image puts time and observation into the image and places emphasis on the shared material surface of the group. In *Contouche* the long shots establish group entitativity with the vision of the figures moving together through landscape. What was interesting in these two pieces was the fact that *group-ness* was not predicated on camera techniques or point of view. Instead, the presence and the composition of the costumed figure defined these works (even before the footage was edited). Whether viewed from a distance or at close range, the figures’ primary connective device is the movement, direction, volume and form established by the material properties of the Mylar costume. Its tendency to float and swirl around the figures literally extended the physical presence of their form into the landscape and paradoxically made this presence less earthbound and in this sense less stable or immaterial. Its reflective quality acted as a painterly highlight, tracking across the image as the group wandered through the landscape in *Contouche* and flaring against the silhouettes of *Slow Contouche*.

\(^8\) Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience: An Introduction* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2009), 327.
In this piece the group takes center stage and unlike the previous works there is no setting other than a plain grey backdrop. This background was chosen as a way to hone in on the subtle details in the picture. When working with costume and the fine details of making something, a series of decisions is made that affects the look of the final image. These effects often go unnoticed due to competing visual information. With this work the research points the camera at the smaller decisions and less unusual settings to see if some type of ornament could be extracted. *Folk Ornament* builds on the notion of social *mise en scène* and takes its visual cues from vernacular or amateur photography. A static medium shot was used with a tight frame. This framing cropped the figures so that their torsos filled the majority of the image. The work references family photos and how these images are constructed to reinforce notions of togetherness. And how they are often cropped at funny angles and bear an amateurish and playful immediacy while envisioning and promoting modes of social belonging. With this work the group is returned from the wilds to the more customary setting of the family photograph. It is a moving image that refers to the aesthetics of vernacular photography and so I imagined this work to be photograph-esque.

Throughout this project details and objects are included in the scene to open or decenter the image. This was in order to make the images multiply resonant. The method was to work with an idea and introduce a detail into the group image, hoping
some of the object’s discreet unusualness would migrate onto the group. It was a way to alter grouping and make it fuzzy through the deployment of an enigmatic signifier. Jonathan Hay writes of ornament in the terms of an enigmatic signifier. He envisions ornament as a decorative surface-scape that moves between cultures attached to objects.\(^9\) He writes, “Ornament might thus be considered to operate as part of the perceiving periphery of a sociocultural environment and to be so to speak, an especially sensitive layer of that environment’s skin”.\(^10\) Hay’s ornament remains in the realm of inanimate objects but in consideration of an expanded ornament that resides on surfaces in general, this sensitive skin became a resonant visual environment. I had been working with skin in *Milk* as well as the idea of the body as a surface and a container and so began to think about the body’s skin surface in conjunction with costume. The research was also considering the microclimates and moods of small groups and their legitimate if somewhat theoretically neglected need for transference phenomenon to assemble group form.

Many family photographs are initiated by the transference phenomena of an infant. In *Folk Ornament* this depiction is relocated to a moving image. The newborn was introduced into the picture to explore what effect a brand new baby would have on the scene. She was introduced as the enigmatic signifier. The details in this image sit very close to the body and are discreet and simple. I hoped to point to the constructed nature of primary groups through these modest adornments. Some of the details incorporated to highlight the fabricated and temporal nature of *Folk Ornament* include the unfinished edges in the grey costumes, the pearls that are pinned rather than sewn to the sleeves and the informal movement of the figures. The fourth wall was broken with a soundtrack that includes direction to the actors and a technical crewmember that steps into the picture and delivers the infant to the scene. The image is cut with an emphasis on rhythmic timing rather than narrative progression. Frames are duplicated to repeat the motion of the figures and their swaying pearled sleeves. The emotional mood for *Folk Ornament* is predicated upon the infant cast as ornament. She is a new naked member of the group not yet colonized by behavior and custom, yet I imagine her to fill the picture’s surface with an abundance of information. Her sea creature

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\(^10\) Ibid., 69.
movements and plump containment open the scene to both a boundless wilderness and a human ornament.

*Becoming Ornament (The Exhibition)*


The exhibition allowed the works to be dealt with as an ensemble. This was an interesting physical as well as conceptual space to be working in because each piece was developed with particular considerations in mind, yet keeping in mind they would eventually sit together (in a pattern) as a cohesive presentation. This fact offered great latitude in the making of the works. For example shooting the two *Bird* works led directly to shooting *Milk*, which was composed to offset the larger landscape and muted pink tones of *Birds* with the bright green and fragmented crop of *Milk*. Of course all works were shot keeping a lush and playful surface in circulation and this made it easy to mix and match the works without too much difficulty. Ideally these works would have been projected across multiple 16:9 cinematic screens but the cost of this ran into the tens of thousands so it was definitely not an option. In order to
approach the show efficiently and within the time frame and budget, I settled on seven HD screens and a large projection that covered two walls.

These items were organized with reference to an ornament whose fundamental role was to reinforce rhythm rather than spread a pervasive decorative layer over objects. An ornament conceptualized as a discreet series of embellishments deployed to enhance beauty and volume in dimensional spaces. Screens and projections formed the main visual works for the exhibition. The gallery was sharp and angular with these works alone, so draping a large plinth with a generous calico curtain softened the space. The wall across from the row of screens was painted terracotta pink and hung sparsely with seven small stills photographs. The stills were printed on Hahnemühle paper and intended to mitigate the technological space of the electronic media. The painted wall was delicately lit to warm the gallery space. I carried the working method established out in the field into the gallery and approached the installation with a loose idea and a few carefully considered items but let the space dictate the most effective arrangement to build an ornamental and pleasurable mood. The sound for the gallery space was a mixture of birdsong and human song generated by the combined soundtracks of Short Birds and Wigglers. These two monitors were set to highest volume and left to repeat.

Upon reflection I was delighted with the accessibility of this show. I had intended to bring an element of fun and play and beauty to the works that was directly apprehensible, a sensibility that could be ascertained at a moments glance or could continue to develop if the viewer chose to sit with the image. Of course the amount of detail captured by the camera is diabolical and so the slippage between details becomes part of the fun and openness in these works. Presenting the group through ornament revealed ornaments’ continuing association with materials and subjects that are traditionally gendered female. Many viewers remarked on the sensuous and feminine nature of the works. I tried not to overtly stress or activate these readings but also didn’t try to keep them at bay. In the spirit of the Rococo I privileged an individualist and expressive aesthetic strategy and utilized materials and methods that were familiar to me and close at hand.
Conclusion

* Becoming Ornament* looks for points of convergence between groups and ornament and proposes the notion of the group-ornament as a method to think through and elucidate where these two categories intersect and what is formed as a consequence of this intersection. The dissertation begins with a quick review of ornament and then moves to the development of ornament as a technique of the surface, an action or addition that modifies the exterior of an item. The group is revealed in its original capacity as an intentional production and discussed within the terms of creation, appearance and presentation. The research locates a relationship between groups and ornament in the idea of decorum and in the disciplines of archaeology, anthropology and ethnography. In these instances ornament is established as a visual device that signals behaviours, boundaries and classification for both users and perceivers. Ornament, in the case of *schmuck*, is construed as a method for humans to order or explore ways of understanding and operating in the universe. Ornament envisaged as a tool for cosmic exploration enacted through a decorated bodily surface. These are some of the research findings that situate bodies and ornament in direct relation to each other. Key to this project is the notion that surfaces have agency and humans utilize and equip their bodily surfaces to depict and experiment with modes of being in the world.

Researching groups and ornament and developing points of intersection between them allowed a field to be built for the project. In keeping with a contemporary approach, ornament is conceptualized as a surface that in a sense reaches out to both its users and viewers to build a type of emotional or intellectual environment. A conclusion of this research is that ornament performs at the boundaries between items, feelings and thoughts and that even at its most reviled or authoritative, ornaments’ corollaries are human behaviours and feelings. This point of attachment or mediation between artifact and user is one of the dominant ideas to have filtered out during this project. It highlights the truly active juncture between humans and ornament, stepping away from a circumscription or definition for ornament, to address what ornament does. The group is revealed as building its entitativity or group-ness through adornments, attachments, ornaments. These function as material correlates of an emotional, expressive and constructing world. Their usage coupled with a consideration of the
permeability between the boundaries of ‘everything in the picture’ allows the continuous exchange that is the inaugural event of the group-ornament to be identified. Necessary to this research is the reframing of both groups and ornament in light of activity and process rather than as properties that are already always extant. In this way both categories of ‘things’ are approached as active materials, which when handled in conjunction inform and form each other in the dynamic relationship nominated as the group-ornament.

The project distinguishes this form as one that directs attention to its surface in order to form. In doing so it literally visualizes sociability as a material process and the group as an aesthetic practice. In keeping with the original acceptance of gruppo as a fuzzy proposition that appears together through an artful joining of its parts, the project engages with a nascent 21st century ornament that apprehends contingency and generativity rather than precise signals. It was a research surprise to find the word gruppo originally emanated from the art-world and that its definition was specifically tied to the idea of intentional arrangement and uncertainty of form. The project suggests that a ghost of this original expression of performance, artificiality, artfulness and uncertainty persists for groups to this day and in retrospect can be identified as the initiating apprehension that coalesced into this PhD.

The research concludes that the migration of the group from the art-world to the social world is never complete. This conclusion is substantiated by the art of cinema, theatre and literature, which all continue to explore human sociability through fictionalized portrayals of society and Anderson’s sociological notion of imagined communities, which authorizes collectivity through shared imaginings. These alliances are generally concerned with the development of stable and coherent group forms but nevertheless achieve this through some type of shared narrative or linking device that is imaginary, constitutive and superimposed as a new unifying surface. The group presented in terms of ornament highlights the continual passage between these worlds and takes the instability of this surface and the flux between flesh, material and imagination as its subject. The group-ornament distinguishes itself from other collective forms via a surface manifestation that calls attention to its exterior as improvised, incomplete, experimenting and self-revelatory through a material practice that is improvised, incomplete, experimenting and self-revelatory. It is here: in this
manner, in this decorative questioning or inquisitive adornment that a picture of entitativity meets the idea of play, pleasure, creation, contingency and the group is articulated as ornament.

The research takes its cue from the Rococo as a *style* and utilizes its associations with femininity and women, with play, with non-normative masculinity and with dreams to build a picture of ‘smaller subjects’ or subjects that traditionally sit outside of the dominant social and art-making discourse. It locates the Rococo as a vehicle of resistance enacted and in a sense galvanized through style. This is an under researched feature common to style that situates style as an activity that plays out through society in the dress codes and gestures of resistance. Who can forget the transformation of Patty Hearst from California girl to a gun-toting, bereted member of the SLA? The outward manifestation or exteriorization of transformation, metamorphosis, as well as decorum falls under the provenance of ornament. The Rococo is especially useful as a mode of ornamental presentation because it is a resistant decorum that appears with an innocuous sweetness or frivolous dispensability often attributed to notions of ornament and decoration that attenuates the notion of resistance. It doubles back upon itself in a sort of painless or whispered language of resistance that leaves the viewer with a non-threatening apprehension that things aren’t quite right. And is this picture allowed?

The group-ornament makes its break from the pack in two ways. The first is in ornaments’ conception as an item that is close to the body. Twentieth century ornament in particular is conceived as distant from the body and when it is placed in proximity to the body it is characterized by a geometric composition of massed figures that implies a distance between the ornament, the observer and the scene. In this configuration and in the contemporary apprehension of an architectural ornament that displays complex facades of digitally fabricated materials, ornament literally remains away from our hands. A distance is set up from personal use and in the case of twenty-first century notions of affect; a distance from knowledge is implied. Adding to a tradition for ornament as perceived by Semper and Warburg as well as ornament acknowledged as a culturally universal and active practice, the group-ornament formulates a conception of ornament proximal to human hands and knowledge making. Ornament as a technique to present and propose ideas, in this
instance that of the group. The second disruption for group-ornament is in its engagement with a particular type of subjectivity that displays its fabrication and its instability. This fuzzy and elusive presentation sits exactly within the definition of group and reflects the enigmatic and confounding aspect of ornament that I would argue is its operational hallmark. It is this slipping between time, between space and between meaning that must be kept in mind any time we make an appearance.

Towards the development of a general ornamental technique for the artist presenting the group:

• Remember, it takes a refinement of practice and an attention to detail in order to present the group through a technique of ornament.
• The artist must display a primary concern for the surface of the group.
• Although she is building an open or multivalent image, she must remember that the facts of its presentation remain its principle point of entry.
• These facts can and should be multiple but they must return the viewer to the surface of the picture at all times.
• The artist should link her figures through methods that are persuasive and underscored by lightness as opposed to argument.
• Do not jeopardize the picture through the application of an overabundant or excessive layer.
• But reinforce rhythm and attachment through a discreet series of embellishments.
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Author/s:  
Kritzer, Jessica

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