

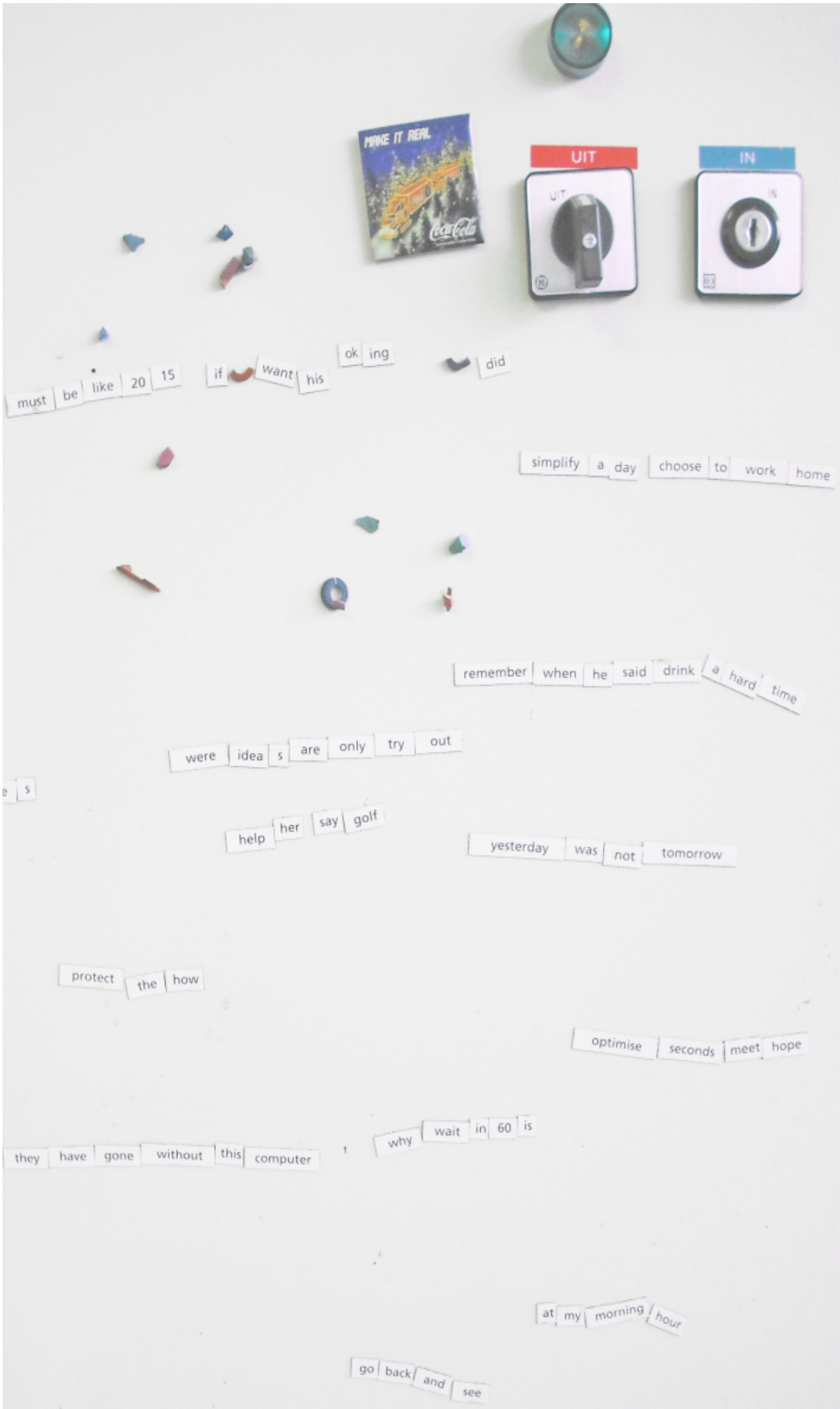
**Marina Elenskaya**

*Do not wait to act... if you're ready*

**Thesis advisor Alena Alexandrova**

**Bachelor Jewellery Design Department**

**Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam, 2011**



# Do not wait to act ...If you're ready\*

## INTRODUCTION

The existence and development of any practice very much depends on creating a language and a grid of conceptions (tools) of analysis for finding position, development and dialogue.

To find out who you are, where you stand and what is your relation to others is an important part of human existence. Generation of an idea leads to an attempt of putting it into words through conceptions that are comprehensible to others - communication. Communicating with another person is the way to find support or opposition. Next step is strengthening common ideas, finding out what needs to be done for their future development. It is also important to find historical connections and common grounds with others.

This process ensures a certain adequacy of comprehension, perception, analysis and possible development of any idea by others. It guaranties that it will not be ignored and forgotten.

In the process of making work and thinking about my future career it increasingly became important to map my way by looking for these essential conceptions, means, tools, qualities that represent field of Contemporary Jewellery.

Starting off with analyzing the work of some of the key representatives of the field, reading critical articles and texts, analyzing relatively brief history of Contemporary Jewellery field and my own work, I drew six important conceptions, which coincide with chapters of the thesis:

*Identity, Value, Language, Wearability, Presentation and Reflexivty.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS:

*Introduction*

*First chapter — Identity*

*Second chapter — Value / Materality*

*Third chapter — Language*

*Fourth chapter — Wearability*

*Appendix*

*Interview — Volker Atrops*

*Interview — Ulrich Reithofer*

*Interview — Manfred Bischoff*

*Fifth chapter — Presentation*

*Sixth chapter — Reflexivity*

*Conclusion*

*Colofon*

Some of them are well historically embedded and deeply connected to the practice, for example such as value or wearability. Others are not yet so adopted: questions of identity, reflexivity and presentation. In my opinion all of them are crucial for the future development and strengthening of the field.

General lack of a strong theoretical base, of genres, movements, where a group of people would join their forces to communicate and promote a certain vision makes the discipline hardly graspable and understandable for an outsider.

The question arises, how do we expect the viewer to react, support or even understand the practice of contemporary jewellery if there is no Manifesto of what it is, who the people involved are and what they want? And how others can take the practice seriously?

The theoretical scene of Contemporary Jewellery field is a peculiar phenomenon. Most of the makers never write about their work. The common practice of fine artists to include writing, analysis and research as a part of a working process is a truly rare case within the field of Contemporary Jewellery. It makes all the more grand the writings of the few makers of the past (Herman Jünger, Otto Kunzli) to whom endless references and comments point their arrows, as this little theory base is the only theory base there is. There are, of course, theorists, critics, whose job is to analyze and weave. Most of these people are art historians busy with general concerns of craft versus art. In their texts, jewellery is inevitably mentioned alongside other applied art disciplines like ceramics, glass, etc. Exclusive analysis of the qualities and issues within the jewellery field is rare. Exhibition reviews and articles for books or magazines are usually commissioned by the organizers and publishers in order to support and praise the maker and his/her achievements. The actual “criticism” (as in critic defined as: one who forms and expresses judgments of the merits, faults, value, or truth of a matter) is also, unfortunately, a rare sight. <sup>1</sup>

Is it due to the relatively small scale of the discipline, relatively short history, absence of defined streams (movements), individual-only based work? Could a well-defined grid of conceptions or tools of analysis help them to come to existence? But one has to start somewhere. I decided that most logical thinking would be to start with writing my own Manifesto. By doing so I was trying to define what is important for me in making work. I believe that investing time and thought in defining your position is crucial not only for communicating with others, but also for solving one’s inner conflicts. It helps to have an overview of the work and discover new possibilities for growth and development.

That is how political and artistic manifestos are coming to life: by gathering, ordering and shaping spine principles of an idea. Without a clear statement of its vantage point and direction, an idea or a movement is likely to cancel itself from existence before it even develops. Political manifestos are usually written in more aggressive manner. Split in short understandable sentences political manifesto ensures an immediate reaction (of either sympathy or rejection) and comprehension of the mass. Artistic manifestos tend to be longer and more complex, sometimes humorous and bizarre, but it seems to always have a reason to be executed in a certain way. As for jewellery makers, I found a part of Ted Noten’s Manifesto in his book *“Ted Noten: CH2=C(CH3)C(=O)OCH3 enclosures and other TN’s”*<sup>2</sup> It very much resembles a political manifesto in its best parts. I appreciated the rough aggressive manner in which the text is written, but I found some places in the text distracting from the actual purpose of a Manifesto as such. Partly it is an action or thriller-like exaggerated description of the death of the field, and partly it is a sober and clever insight that shows field’s deep understanding. Text as a whole does not benefit from this slight duality within the writing style. The final part though, is most exiting:

*“Jewellery must be sentimental and never look for compromise.  
Jewellery must be owned by the public if it wants to touch the public.  
Jewellery must steal and seek to be stolen.  
Jewellery must cherish its enemies in order to make friends.  
Jewellery must forget the psychoanalysis of the studio.  
Jewellery must go out into the street to eat and be eaten.  
Jewellery must be shamelessly curious.  
Jewellery must look where to attack and neglect its defenses.  
Jewellery must use traditional codes in order to break them.  
Jewellery must neither forgive nor forget.  
Jewellery must ignore all prescription.”*<sup>3</sup>

These direct and distilled sentences are appealing and strong. I found this form of manifesto convincing enough, trying to create my own sentences using words like “is”, “must”, “must be”, “must have”, and “must not”. It feels like this approach not only expresses my personal point of view, but also suggests progress, development, and timeline. It took nearly three months to write a draft of my Manifesto, and still it is constantly edited. Despite the doubts of benefiting form this project, it unexpectedly gave me a lot of tools to analyze my own and other people’s work. I found out a lot of controversial and unexpected ideas emerging from this process and realized that in order to proceed and build a strong orientation tool, I needed feedback from people that inspire me with their work and their thinking - living and working artists of today and tomorrow.

I chose three artists who in different ways influenced my work and rising a lot of questions with their own. They have a strong vision concerning jewellery, which does not always coincide with the general views within the field. They all are successful artists, dedicated to their discipline, concerned with its role and it’s future. They are Volker Atrops, Ulrich Reithofer, and Manfred Bischoff.

---

1 The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, London, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000 (revised edition 2009)  
2 CH2=C(CH3)C(=O)OCH3 enclosures and other TN’s .Ted Noten, Rotterdam, 010 Publisxhers, 2006  
3 See full text in the attachment # 2 at the end of the text



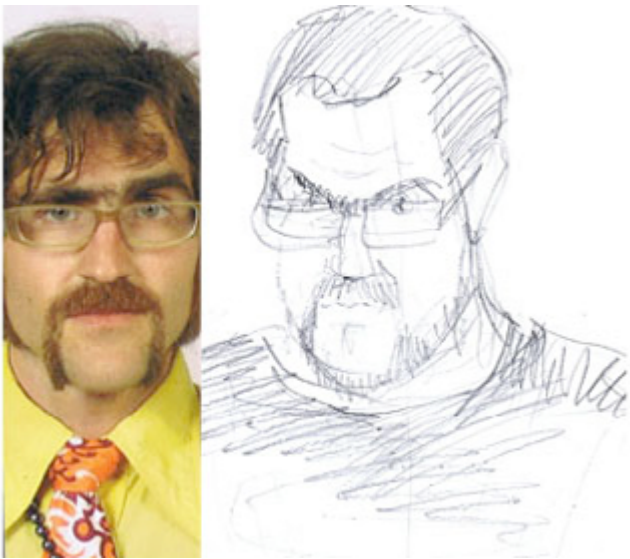


Volker Atrops. Image taken from Volker Atrops' web page:  
<http://www.au-abc.de/>

**VOLKER ATROPS** is a German artist. He is busy making jewellery for almost 30 years now. The urge for making jewellery for him started with the rebellion from old traditions in music, lifestyle, etc., that burst out the 1980s. He started off with remaking old rosaries into earrings, bracelets and necklaces by cutting and pasting parts of them onto each other.

His work is very much intertwined with the every-day, the contemporary culture, trends and subcultures. He draws his inspiration from ordinary every-day things. He believes in humble jewellery, purpose of which is to serve the wearer and not the ego of the maker. I had a pleasure to meet Atrops only recently. I was very interested in things he told about his own work, during the lecture he gave at the Rietveld Academy and also things he saw in my own work, during individual talks with students.

His approach to practicality, wearability, humbleness of jewellery as a discipline devoted to the needs of the wearer I find very valid for the today's situation within the field, where the persona of the maker and his vision became evidently stronger then will to serve the wearer and his needs.



Ulrich Reithofer. Image taken from the web-page: <http://www.kathlibbertjewellery.co.uk/woodyou/ulrichreithoferbiog.htm>

**ULRICH REITHOFER** is an Austrian artist, currently residing in Amsterdam. He is a person who inspired my work greatly. Despite the fact of being a young artist, he has a very deep and special vision of the field. His work is unconventional, monumental, filled with meanings and possible interpretations. Touching the boundaries of illustrative sculpture, yet very much concerned with use and what happens when the piece is worn.

**MANFRED BISCHOFF** is a German artist, born in 1947. He studied jewellery design at the Fachhochschule für Gestaltung/ Pforzheim, from 1972 to 1977 and goldsmithing at the Academy of Fine Arts / Munich with Hermann Jünger from 1977 to 1982. Since 1990s Bischoff moved to Italy, first to Umbria, then to Tuscany, where he still lives, surrounded by the most picturesque Tuscan scenery.



Manfred Bischoff. Taken by me on the day of the interview 3.04.2011 in Manfred's house at San Casciano dei Bagni

Bischoff was my professor in the final year of the Alchimia Contemporary Jewellery School in Florence, where he was teaching from 2001 to 2010. He had a great influence on me personally as well as on my work. In his work, Manfred Bischoff deals a lot with language. He works in highly precious gold, always delivered to him from the same gold mine. Purity of the material transcends the mere materiality and becomes an adequate language for his thinking. Bischoff is undoubtedly one of the most accomplished jewellery artists of today.

I find it interesting that interviewees represent three different generations of makers. All three of them in some way knowingly made a decision to step out of the mainstream within the field of Contemporary Jewellery and carry on with their own philosophy and practice. By stating that I mean that they are not conforming to trends and opinions of the majority. Precisely for that reason I would like to have their points of view in my thesis. I'm seeking answers from these people. I want to see what will come out from the attempt of asking theoretical questions to the makers, giving them the space and the outlet for their thinking. The issues of materiality, value, wearability, scale, process and struggles of making work, source of inspiration, finding your position and your place — all these ideas are common for most of the makers around the globe. That is the reason why I wanted to give a word to the maker.

The questions that are posed to the interviewees are designed by me and specifically addressed to each maker's vision of the field, their work and the concepts they touch upon.

The question: "hello what do you do?" is not merely a matter of defining what your occupation is. In defining how you see yourself and how you contribute to the world around is where I hope to find valuable information about the identity of jewellery. Choosing not to only address this question in a general sense, but to source from the artists that have shaped me and triggered me to think about these issues. Resorting to people I consider having a personal authority, rather than those who are already generally known and acknowledged. I tried to reach out to them in order to get to know their values, and to measure them to the existing critical discourse. The questions in the interviews are specific to each interviewee: hoping to address a range of styles and motives of making work, from the more philosophical to the more practical, from more general to the more sentimental attitudes. Their replies are organized and juxtaposed to existing critical essays and texts on certain subjects in an attempt to critically investigate their views and concepts. By trying to isolate some of these and to critically write about them myself, I am making an attempt to mark the horizon giving way to my aims and aspirations in the field.

## First Chapter

### IDENTITY

"Hello, what do you do?"

Status-anxiety is an ongoing issue within the field of applied arts. These tendencies of identity crisis are undoubtedly influencing the discourses in the field of Contemporary Jewellery as well. There is a certain strive for acknowledgment by the art world. But the precise hierarchy of the art world predicts us an unfortunate role of the inferior discipline. The position of an in-between is also not comfortable for many. People are trying to define themselves as artists, but it almost feels immodest to say it out loud. Definition has a lot to do with function and destination of the work. It has also to do with production, presentation, distribution and, most importantly - pricing. Jewellery wants to be priced as art, and not as craft. It means that the final product is judged upon its conceptual value and innovative thinking, rather than its material value and its quality.

Contemporary Jewellery is looking for a definition, but I simply question if coming up with precise definition will clarify things. In my opinion, it will only close the possibility of future development. Not many appreciate the benefits of being an undefined discipline: the freedom, the impunity and yet the embedded focus on a human body and communication through it.

In his article “VESSEL, PERHAPS”, Edmund De Waal, ceramist and a Professor of Ceramics at the University of Westminster, finds a very sensitive and very appealing realm of uncertainty — “perhaps”. He writes:

“There is a useful taxonomic list that an English museum made of its collections... This list towards its conclusion contained this: tool/ implement (426) — tool/implement, perhaps (1) — toy (13) — transferred (6) — unknown (227) — utensil (46) — vessel (5090) — vessel, perhaps. It is a moment caught between pathos (the curator struggling to define an object) and insight (how can we list the objects in our lives?). It seems apposite for those of us who are attempting to find languages in which to talk about objects: how do we move from the unknown into the known. And how do we keep the ‘perhaps’ alive, how do we find a conceptual and linguistic dexterity in our discourse that prevents a slide into absolutes, certainties, over-robust definitions?”<sup>4</sup>

The way author describes his observation in the museum I find fascinating. De Waal chooses an abstract example to grasp a very intricate long-lasting issue. Finding the appropriate language for talking about known and unknown. Giving up strategies and routines of thinking. Finding the flexibility to describe and grasp the unknown. One of the problems creating the status-anxiety and insecurity among my fellow colleagues is the fact that teaching approach in art schools where jewellery design is taught is quite similar to the one of fine arts. Primarily it is the requirement for jewellery to have conceptual and “innovative” qualities. Artists are constantly busy with re-inventing jewellery and what it is every time. It is a fact that work is no longer required to be wearable (fit for the human body), well executed, etc. - all the formerly key characteristics of jewellery as such. The main requirement for the student work is the strong standing concept followed by the statement of necessity of materials and forms used. Choices made need to be justified and consequent with the concept. Glue, for instance, is used continuously while executing jewellery work. General use of glue is common in both classical and contemporary jewellery, but the visible presence of it, for instance, was formerly considered as a mistake. Nowadays the visibility of glue is not only allowed, but it is considered and treated as a material just as much as metal or stones. Same goes for the quality of soldered metal. The seams of two connected sheets of metal meant to be impeccably invisible. Smallest holes or drops of unfired solder were, again, considered a mistake. Nowadays techniques are opposed to that approach. Every step of action must be visible: solder, drilling stone, connecting parts, etc. Actions, process, presence of the maker is important in communicating concepts and ideas.

It is the presence of the maker that started the separation of the contemporary jewellery from the classical jewellery in the 1950s-1960s. Herman Junger, one of the most important figures in the field of Contemporary Jewellery was a strong supporter of an “ideal craftsman”<sup>5</sup> “a man who combines the two great human possibilities--Thought and Action--in one creative profession. He [is] a unified, un-split person, and in this unity he finds the meaning and harmony of his existence.”<sup>6</sup> Junger, a trained goldsmith soon realized that the fluency of his sketches and his vision of jewellery on paper were inevitably losing its quality when realized in metal. For many years Junger was mastering his technical skills alongside his conceptual vision in order to translate the lightness and effortlessness of his watercolors in gold and stones. He was busy breaking up symmetry, creating uneven, scratched surfaces, using stones as his color palette. As a result, he achieved a new aesthetic, peculiar, fragile lines and compositions - his own expression of beauty. His work and his writings, among others of his time, lay in the very foundation of ideas of Contemporary Jewellery design and making. But if Junger was at the very source of the “branching” of the Contemporary Jewellery from the traditional ideas, many generations of makers took his ideas even further.

In his interview Volker Atrops talks about a very interesting conception he calls “center” of the jewellery field. He describes the field of Contemporary Jewellery as a dartboard with the simple metal chain

hanging in the middle of it, marking the essential center as: “... clearly just a chain and nothing else, its a decoration piece for the body, jewellery piece, simple...” He claims this “center” to consist of traditional objects of jewellery - historical examples of jewellery archetypes such as a wedding ring or a pearl necklace: “...It’s so strong, that no matter where you go, to everyone it is clear that this is a jewellery piece.” It’s the objects themselves, but also their meaning, history, importance, the imprint they left on our culture and immediate associations they trigger. These objects are fit to the human body, they have a very particular purpose and they are solely dedicated to the wearer, humble servants of their owners.

Since the beginning of Contemporary Jewellery starting in 1950s and up until now the “center” is being constantly “re-discovered”, “re-invented” or simply expanded. After the Second World War, jewellery artists became more aware of intellectual and conceptual approaches to jewellery, starting to question the value of jewellery as such tightly connected only to its material value. Artists felt the need of exploration and interaction with other neighboring fields. In Atrops’ opinion, attempts to push the boundaries of the field, which were made in the 70s-80s, were rarely successful. They deserve a place in history, but in general, such mentality is taking artists, and - together with them — the whole discipline — away from its essential role and purpose:

“...The center is very important and if you are studying, don’t lose the center. In the process you can turn to the periphery and explore, but you always have to come to the central point...and that’s why it’s a pity that all the talents at art schools don’t work around or try to manipulate the center. So they leave it to the main stream. It’s a pity, because the center connects us to the daily culture, to our culture. Like ethnic jewellery of Africa: to our eyes it’s exotic because of its strange forms or colors, material combinations, but it fits in their culture, it reflects their daily life. The kind of nature they live in, their conditions, rituals, the whole life span... Works made on these margins of the field, it’s more like a dead-born child. Some things worked out, but it didn’t really become a part of our culture, remaining a small insider club of nerds”.<sup>7</sup>

The question about personal visualization of the field was asked to all of the interviewees and in Ulrich Reithofer’s representation different disciplines appear as colors, creating a color palette, similar to those of early art classes, where they teach students how to mix colors. He states, that as long as the color recognizes itself and remains strong about its position, there is no need to worry that it will lose its own identity. He says: “...someone goes into the sculpture, someone goes into architecture, someone goes into fashion, music etc. But the stronger you realize your own color, the stronger you can blend in with other colors. Without losing your own.” Reithofer is a supporter of collaborations and he keeps an open mind in terms of exploring new possibilities through other disciplines: “...I try to blend in with these purple theatre people, blue architects and orange photographers, because it’s interesting and it comes back into my own discipline. I think it’s very important that each individual finds its own blending.” He appreciates the crossed-discipline projects, like architecture-jewellery collaboration, where attempts to step out of one’s field represent a great challenge to explore and test artist’s vision. Being confronted with issues of scale, durability, choice of new materials in attempt to transmit one’s own language and aesthetic in another discipline. Artist undoubtedly benefits from bringing all those things back into his general work. Reithofer is confident that certain amount of “mixing” is necessary to learn about one’s own practice and really find a true place for oneself: “Many of these attempts might not be successful, and maybe I will find myself blending with too many other colors that my original color either will fade away, or... I will find my own in-between color that is only mine.” Definition offered by Manfred Bischoff is “Kunst ist eine behauptung”.<sup>8</sup> He sees it as a claim, and he reserves the right to claim something as jewellery: “Jewellery for me is what I declare jewellery”.

4 Think Tank Edition 01, 2004: The Foundation. Edmund De Waal  
5 Conception, described by British design reformer William Morris (1834-1896) based on the ideal of a guild, in which the craftsman both designed and executed the work.  
6 Hermann Junger, 1979, quoted in “A Goldsmith’s World,” Art Aurea, 1/89, p.58.  
7 Quoted from Volker Atrops’ interview.  
8 Translates from German language as: “Art is a claim”



He talks about these three important conceptions:

- Standing behind the work and taking all the consequences;
- Claiming what jewellery is;
- “Over-living” jewellery.

In my opinion, what he is trying to say is that he sees jewellery as his ultimate language of expression. He is standing behind it in a sense that he does not doubt the outlet of his thinking to be jewellery. But the choices he makes concerning concepts, forms, materials, etc. are not confiding with whatever expectations there are towards jewellery as such. He takes an active position in making this decision. He declares what jewellery is. Whether the viewer accepts it or not is another question, but the artist must hold a strong position. For him the realm of art is situated beyond (below) the realm of common values of success and materiality. (See image) Where +1 “Super Asshole” is a successful manager of a big company and 0 “Asshole” is a regular person with a regular job, the bubble of Art finds itself in the negative, opposite realm. Artist, according to this

## Second chapter

### VALUE / MATERIALITY

Value is used over and over again as a subject in Contemporary Jewellery. It happens due to the fact that material value of jewellery was historically considered one of its primal characteristics; it was considered an investment of wealth and a symbol of status. Approaching jewellery through the concept of value gives artists a powerful tool to question values of today's society in more general way. Jewellery is a supplementary object, worn on the body, which has a special meaning for the wearer and simultaneously transmitting a certain message to the viewer. In its earlier history the value of jewellery was lying in its material - it was the message of wealth or status, now value is shifted to its statement, its power of communication and its idea. The notion of wealth and whether it needs to be shown off and how also goes through certain changes. Contemporary Western society has little to do with Nomadic tribes that developed very intricate and elaborate jewellery, be-

concept of “over-living”. Bischoff claims gold to be an adequate material for his thinking, not only because of its inevitably high actual value, but also because “It is the only material that is ready for a change. The old human way to over-live is to begin this change... If I have gold here I can immediately change it in another way. I don't have to do anything to clean it and etc. It's like clear water.” It is the material that embodies multiple complex notions like purity, heritage, supremacy, etc. Material, that can handle and tie together issues of a great range: from high philosophical discourses, references to ancient and contemporary cultures, psychoanalysis - to funny and ridiculous extracts from newspapers and fleeting sexual fantasies. Material is one of the means of communication. It is a language. In the context of Contemporary Jewellery I find it an important notion to consider.

In the introduction to the book “Üb ersetzen”, 1993 by Gert Staal writes about Manfred Bischoff's work in the beginning of his career: “The language is not yet adequate...and so no name could be given in advance to the forms he was exploring. What's more, the use of cheap materials, like iron and polystyrene meant that the pieces were actually try-outs, theatre performances in rehearsal. Bischoff attributes this to the lack of identity”. This extraction mentions four very complex conceptions, such as “language”, “form”, “material” and “identity”. Language and identity here are closely connected to the expressive qualities of cheap materials. Bischoff wanted the work to communicate in a certain way and these materials were not meeting his requirements. Gold, as a substance, gives Bischoff freedom. The adequacy he found in this material gave him answers to a lot of struggles concerning means of making work. Choice of the material dictates embedded values. It is not only the actual price of it, but many more notions, like its symbolic or emotional connotations, its similarity to other materials, its rarity etc.

Starting in the 1960s, jewellery designers started adopting alternative materials. Their choices became more personal and sensitive to their concepts. Use of industrial materials, ready-mades, and cheap, overabundant materials was widely introduced within the field. Vocabulary of materials and their application today finds itself liberated from any previous struggles against expectations of the public. Jewellery broke free from common conceptions of value seen exclusively from the position of material value. Nowadays notion of value comes in from many different perspectives. In some cases it's the aesthetic decisions in pursuit of creating a harmonic sculptural forms; in other cases it is the investment of time and craftsmanship that adds the value to cheap material. Sometimes common objects or materials are treated as if they were precious or vice versa. Adding value happens also by combining several materials together: use the hierarchy of materials (hierarchy based on materials value, rarity, etc.) in order to raise one material's value with help of another.

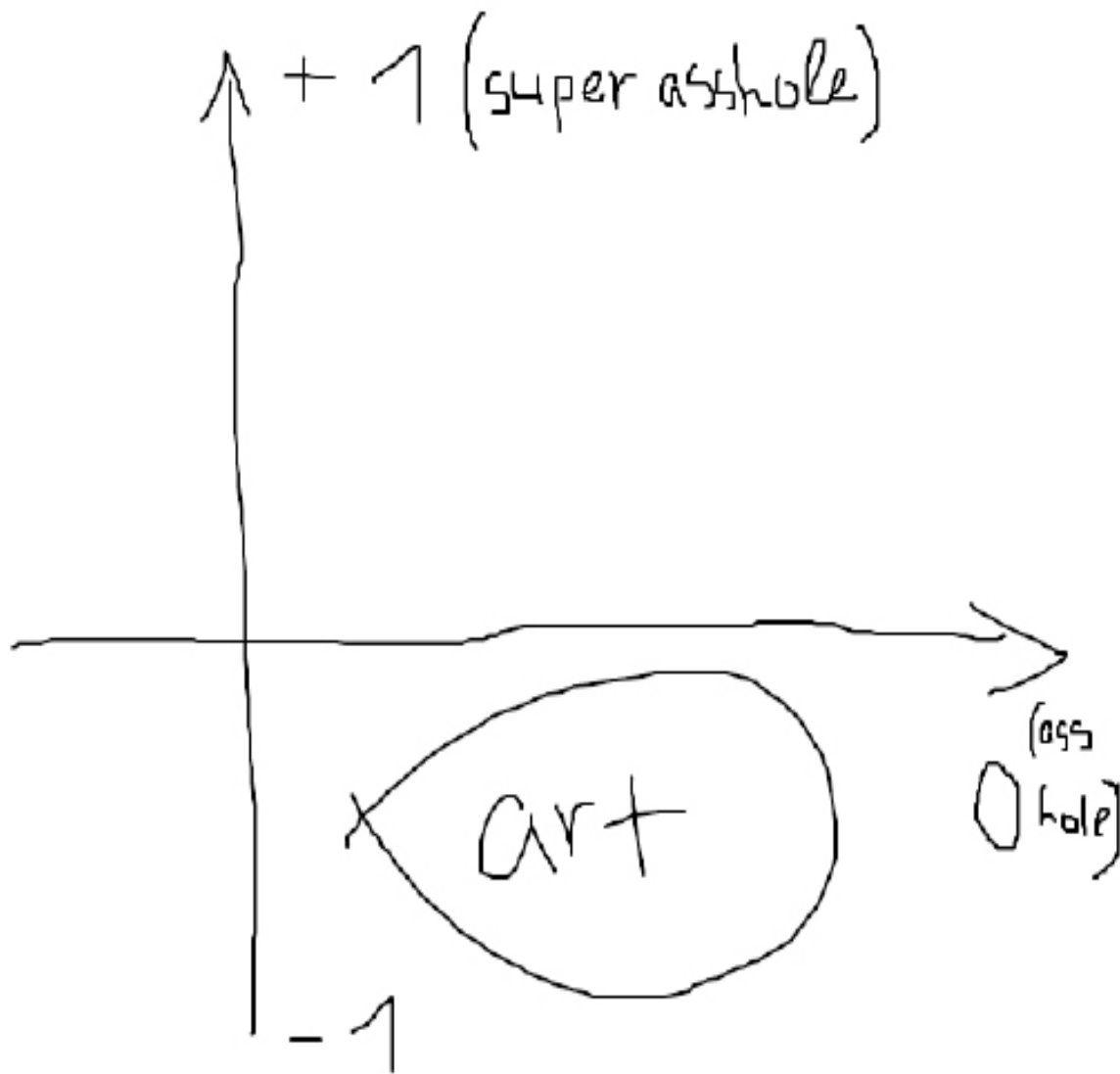


Image 4: A graph Manfred Bischoff once drew during his class at Alchimia Contemporary Jewellery School in Florence, 2009

point of view, is the person going opposite direction from what is considered to be common understanding of the “right direction” - he goes minus. Making jewellery is not only about re-inventing it or rethinking it. Neither it is about bouncing off other fields in order to strengthen one's own position. It is really about finding what is jewellery from an individual point of view and how one sees its aesthetics or values through personal knowledge and experience. What is jewellery in today's culture, in the city, on the streets? How shall it relate to the human body? One shall make these decisions and accept all the consequences.

cause it was the only portable sign of wealth, apart from livestock. What is the best way to keep an eye on your treasure and simultaneously show it off then to wear it?

Throughout history the steady value of gold, silver and precious stones made them most logical currency throughout nations and time periods. Both in the East and West jewellery made out of precious metals was periodically demounted, melted and re-made according to new government or new fashion. Memories and traditions of entire generations were melted in ceramic crucibles and obedient metal was ready for another embodiment. In his interview Manfred Bischoff talks about the

LANGUAGE

“Most of our thoughts and emotions are accompanied by an inner language or writing. This private language has to be given a place, these thoughts expressed, and an echo sought in the realm of the visible.”

Manfred Bischoff, “Üb ersetzen”, 1993

The work on chapters “Value/Materiality” and “Language” was synchronized, as I was writing on one, within the same line of thinking, the questions of the other would appear. These are very close conceptions when it comes down to analysis of Contemporary Jewellery discipline. The connection lies within personal understanding of each notion by the artists. Some find the ultimate outlet for their language and their thinking by finding an adequate material. In other cases, the subject of material value is questioned through language. These are the tools used by artists in terms of language and communication:

- Written language
- Titling
- Communication
- Means
- Sources

In the work of Manfred Bischoff language appears as a trigger for the thinking process, catalyst for the working process and an active part of the work itself — becoming a title. He says: “I’m not searching; I’m just reading newspapers. That’s all. I see wrong sentences and that is what I’m interested in. I see how people derogate words that are really important. I try to protect these words and give them a new frame in gold. Every case is different from another, it is not systematic, it’s inner. I’m reading one day and: “Oh, Jesus, now I have it!”...These are the things I’m interested in. When reality collides with stupidity, some kind of absurd. This point of collision is my place, my realm.” The big collection of newspaper cutouts, images, posters, etc., Bischoff calls “blueprint”, is where the awkwardness and peculiarity of the written language connects with reality, with making work. He sees himself being constantly aware of the language around him, yet waiting for the right moment when “things fall together, come down to one point...”



Image 5: Piero Della Francesca’s fresco depicting Hercules.

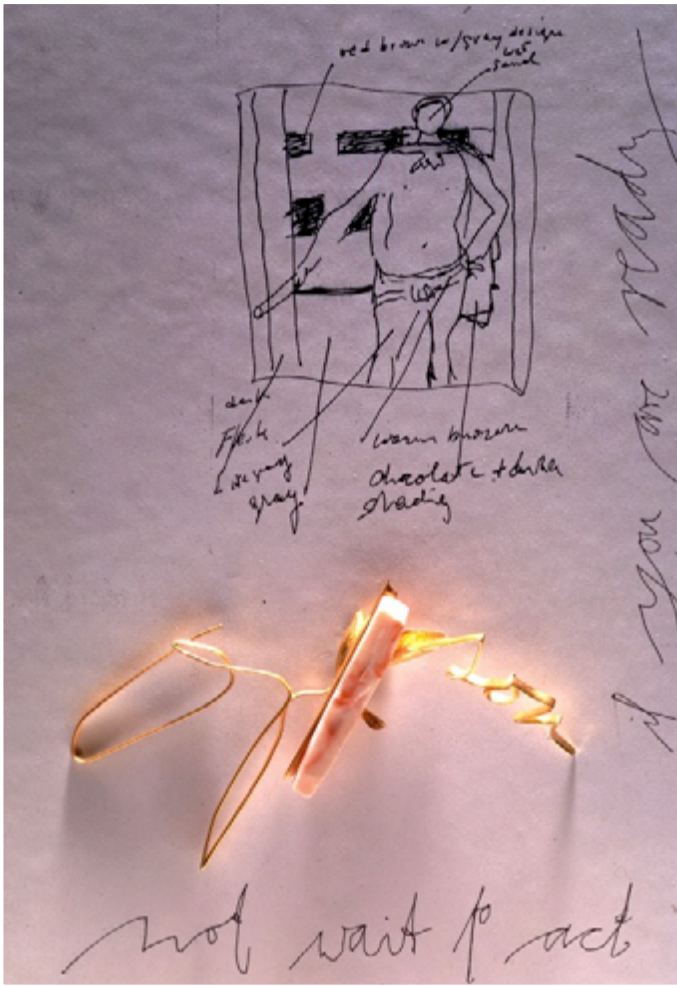


Image 6: Manfred, Bischoff, Or-son, 2002. During his residency at Isabella Steward Gardner Museum.

This “pre-explosive” moment of waiting for the right time, and yet readiness to act immediately is embodied in a sentence that is very important for Bischoff’s work and thinking - “Do not wait to act...If you are ready”.

Bischoff found this phrase during his artist residency at Isabella Steward Gardner Museum in 2002 on the back of Piero Della Francesca’s fresco. The phrase is not visible anymore, and Bischoff found out about its existence thanks one of the restorer’s notes. Della Francesca supposedly wrote the sentence on the back of his fresco depicting young Hercules (img. 5)

Alan Chong, the curator of the collection at the Isabella Steward Gardner Museum writes about this piece: “Does the almost-awkward figure, tentatively poised in a doorway, express the sense of doubt that comes when confronting an important decision?” I find it fascinating, that Della Francesca is seemingly answers this question with his: “Do not wait to act...If you are ready” and how Bischoff inevitably finds this very phrase the most interesting and immediately reacts with his piece “Or-Son” (img. 6) Two short words made in gold wire are separated from each other with a coral bar. The dimensions of this coral bar and its angle are identical to those of the wooden stick that Hercules is holding in his hand. The gesture of Hercules is unclear: he is not rising, nor lowering the stick, there is no expressive emotion on his face, which would tell us what, he is about to do. And to me, this is the perfect illustration of the “pre-explosive waiting before the action - it has no sense to do something without a key...I’m saying: “I make this if I’m ready,” Then - I do it. Waiting for this explosive moment is important. But you must be prepared, and then act immediately.” This is a good example demonstrating how language transcends its limits and embodies into the “realm of the visible”. Titling pieces Bischoff considers just as much a part of the work, as the drawing or the piece itself. His titles are very peculiar, aimed to confuse the viewer: “I think it’s better to confuse him. It should look to him as if it would help. So what he reads is not what he reads... But I’m not tricking him, not leaving him alone... The viewer shall not find the “hole”. He always wants the way out. But it is very foolish to find the “hole”. And by “hole” I mean solution, a certain kind of solution.” Viewers find their own solutions, but Bischoff wants to extend the moment of reflection. He does not want the answer to come easy. Nor does he want to be unreadable. The number of recognizable symbols, accumulated in his sketches, words, pieces are communicating. They have a message to share, but it is encrypted. Meanings inside Bischoff’s drawings are highly personal. The viewer might never be able to come close enough to understand. He gets what he sees. He is free to make his own conclusions. But what counts is the attempt of communication, in Bischoff’s words - another way to “over-live”. I already mentioned the conception of “over-living” concerning materiality and value. “Over-living” is also about communicating, about trying to bring some order into the confusion. “I think one must come to a certain inner confusion. Then either I hold this confusion or I try and solve it. So the confusion for me is the sign of readiness, because one must find the way out - to regulate it. Either you write it down, or you sing a song etc. It is called supplementation.”

Attempt to regulate the chaos; to express the inner confusion is exactly the moment when the process of making drawings comes in. They are releasing the pressure built within. They are the first step between the work of mind and the work of hand. When I asked Bischoff why he exhibits drawings together with jewellery piece if their nature is so intimate, he replied: “It’s the only way to over-live.”

Ulrich Reithofer is talking about the importance of finding means of making work. During his early studies he discovered the possibility to use ready-mades together with his own creation in one piece of jewellery: “I made brooches with ready-made safety pins. It was an easy way out. I made pieces, but then I wanted to connect them to the body somehow. So what is the easy way? Take a safety pin and just stick your clothes! Then Theo (Theo Smiths, Professor at Idar-Oberstein) said, this is not true jewellery, because you use something existing and then put it onto your artwork in order to connect it to the body. So then I decided to justify the safety pin as my means to jewellery. To prove that I’m allowed to do this, because that is what I wanted to do: use a ready-made together with my creation to get carried around on the body. It was a golden frame for a painting; on the back there was a safety pin, nailed with about 100 nails. And on the lower part, where you usually have a title of the painting it said, cut out of silver: “Ambitiously covered safety pin as a piece of jewellery”. So a lot of work



do anything I want as long as it is a “round thing”, as long as it makes sense.”

He is touching upon an important issue of finding one’s own means of making work and standing behind them, without looking back to the whatever existing expectations there are in the field of jewellery. It is important to realize that these kinds of discoveries are precisely things that move the discipline further. Discoveries within. Ones, that have to do with expansion of the key characteristics of the field: value, language, wearability, etc. Finding one’s own solution for what jewellery is and what should it communicate, is something each maker needs to face on his own terms. “It’s about putting things in a different prospective. Say, the chair, we know it as a furniture object in the room. What happens to the object in the room when it’s worn on the body? It’s the irritation that communicates. I think jewellery has to irritate to work. ... Someone will ask: “Why does she wear a fucking chair?!” That would mean I achieved my goal — I started a communication.”<sup>10</sup>

Means of communication defined as language are different for Volker Atrops. In his work Atrops deals a lot with notions of “daily life”, “contemporary culture”, simplicity and wearability. He strongly believes that contemporary jewellery has to integrate more into the every day life. “About this “daily life”, the word is translated from German “alltag” (translates to English like: everyday, everyday life, weekday) and with this word I mean that jewellery is a part of our culture, but what was developed in our culture in the past twenty years came more from subcultures like punk with its piercings, acid house scene, pop, hip hop with its bling-bling. All these subcultures are influencing the jewellery field and now a lot of mainstream people wear piercings, it’s quite common...So that is how things become adopted by culture, but things that are shown at Marzee<sup>11</sup>, or other galleries, or what people from the 80s achieved — non of it became a part of the culture.” When he first started making jewellery work, Atrops was busy with making wire rings. Simple both technically and formally, these rings were an investigation of both material and shape, having already a lot to do with surrounding culture of the 90s. They had this specific “street vibe” to them, as the technique was somewhat knitting in metal and Atrops was busy doing it in the metro and meetings, having all he needed to make work on him: “It was a little box with a lot of wire and I had two tools. I wanted to try all these different forms; it was for me like baking bread, something really simple.” His professors at the Munich Art Academy did not share this fascination with, what Atrops calls it - “ethnic style”. They saw something already existing and moreover “low”, “hippie”, somewhat “you can do it at a flea market”- like. After going through some re-thinking and adopting to the art school approach, Atrops still comes back to wire rings, but now, they have a distinct art school aesthetics to them, the work lost it’s authenticity. I find Atrops’ example very useful in terms

of thinking about the language and means of expression. “Ethnicity” in Contemporary Jewellery discipline is generally looked down upon, as it is considered “crafty” and even bad taste. Whether it has to do with local traditional aesthetics (folk or ethnic jewellery), use of local materials (shells, etc.) or use of local techniques, it is always finding itself on a “lower” position in the Hierarchy of Contemporary Jewellery, where highest positions are given to conceptual work in which materials play secondary role. In Atrops’ case the use of wire was connected to the DIY jewellery you can find on markets. There was also a kind of ethnicity to it, but it was a different kind. It was a language, a communicational tool, which reflected the culture of the 90s. In his further development, Atrops looks back at the “loss of ethnicity” with regret, as his work in general deals with the notion of the contemporary culture and the “everyday”. We can conclude that in making work, one should consider language as a strong tool of communication and apply it meaningfully.

Atrops believes that Contemporary Jewellery should be “adopted” by the general culture and be worn by people on the streets. I see this democratic approach affecting ways of production, re-thinking the whole notion of one-offs, pricing, distribution, etc. Atrops also questions the notion of the “artist” behind the work. He insists that work should be about the wearer. The language in this sense lies in being part of the every day life. My disagreement with Volker’s point of view lies in understanding what is the destination and purpose of Contemporary Jewellery as a phenomenon opposed to conventional jewellery. What are we there for? What is our audience and what do we want to give them? I don’t believe that these two conceptions should be mixed together. The destination of Contemporary jewellery is not to fall into the steps of the general culture, but quite the opposite — to offer new way of approaching jewellery and what it can be. It is the question of following or leading. I see the perception of what is jewellery and what is wearable changing and more and more people (and let this group stay relatively small) are wearing non-precious, statement jewellery because the wearers support of share certain aesthetics or ideas of those of the makers. And that’s exactly where I find the position of Contemporary Jewellery — to educate and influence the general culture, opposed to complying with it. There is a lot of mainstream (good and bad) jewellery busy with precisely same ideas of creating trends which influence or being influences by the contemporary culture. It is a big market and it involves different aspects of modern society like music, fashion, media and etc. I find the role of Contemporary Jewellery outside of this bubble not because it is not accepted of it is alien to it, but because it should not be there. It’s a question of different perspective. Contemporary Jewellery field needs to widen its audience, find new ways of distribution, promotion, presentation, but these solutions don’t necessarily have to lie in the realm of the general culture.



Image 7: Wire rings by Volker Atrops in the Gallery for Applied Arts in Munich.

Fourth Chapter

WEARABILITY

Raison d’etre

The notion of wearability belongs exclusively to the realm of jewellery when it is analyzed alongside other forms of art. That is what jewellery is — wearable art, no matter how obvious it might sound. The intimate contact with the human body, relation to it and speculations on the subject create the main frame for jewellery making. In the process of making work these notions of wearability are to be dealt with:

- Functionality
- Scale
- Weight

Jewellery makers use these notions to strengthen their concepts. While making work, one is constantly busy with thinking of ways to apply them. Ulrich Reithofer answers the question why he chose jewellery and not, say, sculpture as his form of artistic expression: “Well, I anyway do sculpture, because a ring is a sculpture, brooch is a sculpture; parts of a necklace are always sculptural. But sculpture is based on the ground, there is a relation to the human body in size, but it is based somewhere and stays there. The jewellery is somehow worn and at a certain moment comes to the body and creates this personal relation with the body, it communicates only through the body. And the sculpture would not do that.”

Jewellery being a sculpture is an undeniable fact: it has to work from each side, and even the back of the brooch, which is not seen by others, is resolved consequent to the whole idea of the work. A ring or a pendant are perfect sculptures, as each side of them is to be seen and artists have found a lot of solutions to put each element to use. Even the way the stone is set on a ring is consequent to the idea.

9        Something added to complete a thing, make up for a deficiency, or extend or strengthen the whole.  
10       Extract form the interview with Ulrich Reithofer.  
11       Marzee Modern Jewellery Gallery, Nijmegen, Netherlands





Image 8: Adam Grinovich, *Crystal Pin Ring*, 2007

On the image we can see an example of consequent solutions within the aesthetic of the piece. This is a ring by Adam Grinovich. He uses hairpins to construct a ring, and resolves the stone setting by tying the crystal to these pins with horsehair. The image is complete: hairpins with tangled up hairs trigger immediate reaction. In his work Ulrich Reithofer deals with sculptural aspects of jewellery and what happens in the wearing. “The object that I make, this sculpture, has to imply the use. Even if it’s not wearable, even if it hurts when worn, then there is a statement about the non-wearability. But the human relation that lies in dimension to the body is important.” We discussed some of his works and I intend to use one of them as an example. “Conspiracy” is a necklace he made in 2009. It consists of chess pieces: five small pawns opposed to a larger pawn. He talks about this work: “Its about the few big ones that tell us how we are so little. But the minute we create a group we a stronger.”

Visually the group of small pawns appears insignificant and defenseless against a huge figure opposed to them. But there is another aspect that comes in once you “experience”/wear this piece — the weight of both elements is absolutely equal. Conceptual intention of the work becomes apparent through viewer’s own bodily senses: the One and Many are equal in weight, no matter how intimidating and powerful someone might seem, if you join forces with others, you can prevail. This optimistic notion is transmitted with subtlety and style by using means of wearability. Something happens in the wearing: a piece of jewellery starts its ultimate play by being worn. Volker Atrops says: “In our field we have the idea that there is an author and he makes a piece and that is ultimately ... the destination. But I think only if someone wears a jewellery piece that is precisely the moment when these pieces come alive. That’s the thing, not in the vitrine, not in the gallery, not in the catalogue, not as an example...” The life of a jewellery piece has two chapters: the making and the wearing. When the work is done, the maker passes his creation on; the piece acquires new meanings, maybe even new name. Its worn by someone else and the intimate relationship with the wearer stretches far beyond what the maker can predict or expect. The artist lets go, and the responsibility is no longer his. Bischoff comments: “I have experienced that people who bought my pieces had their own private names for them. So they stopped using my title. And I allow this. It’s fine. The work is no longer my responsibility.” I see a certain poetic notion in this process. Someone putting a lot of meaning and personal history into something that will belong to someone else, establishing a new relationship makes the piece of jewellery an ultimate tool of communication. Volker Atrops sees a jewellery artist as a humble maker, which shall reduce the presence of his “ego” in the work. He says that investing too much of yourself into work might be dangerous and never satisfying for the maker. The inevitable outcome is that the wearer, his persona always comes first. Therefore high expectations from the piece to be “super piece”, some kind of achievement, will come crushing down for the maker. He says: “...that’s not the sense of the thing. The girl or the man who wears this piece is the king!” During his lecture at the Rietveld Academie, he showed us an interesting comparison of two different types of wear. It was two pictures, placed next to each other. First image (see interview #1) was of Ruudt Peters<sup>12</sup>, wearing a big mask-like brooch in the middle of his chest, and the other one of Aaliyah<sup>13</sup>, wearing a neck chain and a bracelet.

Volker elaborates: “Yes, it’s about how they wear this jewellery. I’ve never seen anyone wearing something like this. Mask is a nice object, but I don’t know if it fits to the body. The whole outfit, the glasses, they work together very well to create the image, but the jewellery piece becomes this alien, strange thing, somehow... Then the singer, she wears jewellery in a very simple way, and it’s easy to see what the function of the jewellery is. That it really becomes this decoration for her body, leading the eye of the viewer in a very sexual way. And that’s what jewellery is often about!”

Scale is not arbitrary either. A change of scale of an abstract shape has a different result then by doing so with a representational shape. Confronted with altered dimensions of an abstract shape the viewer is trying to relate to it in another way each time. It’s a bodily, instant confrontation, which is hard to avoid. Taking an illustrative representational shape, on the other hand, has another effect, as it has more to do with misplacement of an object, changing the reading and perception of the recognizable. Scale is affecting how comfortable the piece would be, how noticeable by others. Jewellery can be very “quiet” and intimate, hidden from others, containing personal emotional secrets. Jewellery can also be aggressive and shouting, attracting immediate attention and demanding reaction. Needless to say, many artists are exploiting this aspect of wearability as well.

The notion of weight I would like to approach from both literal and metaphorical aspects. The lightness or heavy weight of a piece of jewellery has to do with what is expected from a certain material or size. Many artists use that by misplacing and shifting these notions. Metaphorical aspect of weight accumulates in “informative”, personal weight — the story that lies behind the piece. Reithofer comments: “There is a constant discussion in our field on when does a piece of jewellery become unwearable by carrying too much of personal information. And I’m very aware of that... Which means I create, I pile things up, and then I start to cut away. In the process I try to stay as communicative as possible and then show work to the people I trust. And they tell me what they see. Sometimes it does not tell the story, but sometimes HA..! It does not tell my story, it tells THE story!” The universality of emotions, common sensations of certain experiences are notions many people can relate to. Symbols, language, shifting of scale and weight, preciousness or scarceness — these are the tools in hand of jewellery artists in attempt to communicate their stories. Sharing details of the artist’s story is not the issue. People often would not want to buy a piece of jewellery, if they come to knowing it is dedicated to someone’s death, for instance. It is not about “my” story; it’s about “THE” story, well said by Reithofer. I think the viewer is attracted more to the amount of concentration, emotional charge invested, relating to it on subconscious levels, rather than to details of personal history.

Artists like Marc Monzó, for example, consciously reduce personal load on each piece of jewellery, giving away a little portion each time. He says: “I don’t want to put too many personal questions in the pieces... then pieces are too heavy and people would not like those pieces, because we all have a lot of problems in our life, enough problems and emotions, I think. So, I just like to put small information of all these emotions and then people take with them what they need.”<sup>14</sup> As an artist, one must not get carried away with loading work with too much personal meaning and try to stay communicative. Count the wearer in! Consider his role in the life of a piece. To conclude this chapter, I would like to quote Ted Noten’s Manifesto: “Contemporary jewellery is superfluous. After all, what could it possibly contribute that other visual arts do not explore at least equally as well? Intimacy, unease, voyeurism, consolation, exuberance, silence, beauty...? None of these belong exclusively to the domain of the jewellery designer. The moment the wearer was banished from the equation and the very social codes that had provided it with its most specific meaning were vilified contemporary jewellery gave up its *raison d’être*.” The notion of use/wear is embedded in the foundation of what jewellery is. Passing on a piece of jewellery from the maker to the wearer has a symbolic meaning and gives work a destination. Jewellery can gain more friends and followers allowing this generosity become an inseparable part of it’s being.

12 Ruudt Peters, 1950, NL. Peters has been connected as professor at two of the most prestigious universities in Europe, the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam 1990-2000 and Konstfack University of Arts and Crafts in Stockholm 2004-2009. At the moment he is professor at Alchimia Jewellery school in Florence.

13 Aaliyah, 1979-2001, USA. Famous actress and pop singer, died in a plane crash.

14 “Jewellery Talk”, a film, made in 2006 by K Hedman & K Lindberg, students at Ädellab/Metallformgivning, Konstfack Sweden. <http://www.jewellerytalk.se> (21.04.2011)





Image 9: The image of contemporary jewellery

## Appendix

### Interview #1

'Slicing the pie of the everyday'

Volker Atrops. 20.01.2011

M: (showing the photo of the dartboard) (img. 1) Can you please tell something about this image.

V: Yes, ok. I made this photo for this workshop, but before it was hanging like this in my workshop. But without the darts, just the board with the chain. I added darts to the sides later, just to make it clear that there is a center and the board symbolizes jewellery field, and the chain that hangs in the middle makes it clear that its about jewellery.

M: Did you make the chain?

V: No, I found it on a flea market, its clearly just a chain and nothing else, its a decoration piece for the body, jewellery piece, simple, no precious stones, no gold ... Then there are three darts, I purposely put them on the periphery area of the board. And what I wanted to say with this, is that there is a whole field of jewellery and a center, which is maybe a simple wedding ring or a pearl necklace that has history, suitable to the body and has a lot of meaning and its so strong that no matter where you go, to everyone it is clear that this is a jewellery piece. And the fact that it fits very well to the body and very well developed over thousands of years makes it the center somehow. And then to see where the field ends, maybe some people explore boundaries because they are kind of bored, or maybe because what you can develop is already developed they are looking for new areas, for new fields, they want to put some things from outside ( that case from art) in. Then you have the periphery I name each dart after Rudt Peters, or Otto Kunzli or Peter Skubic or other people that in the nineties or the eighties were busy with working in the periphery, trying to look for the boundary, or to overstep the edge of the boundary, they tried to do it. In general they didn't get the point...

M: Yes, because when you go on exploring, its nice to get out there, but you get further away from the center...

V: You are getting out or want to open a kind of door somewhere, let something new in, its quite important, but most things are already defined.

M: In contemporary jewellery?

V: Not in contemporary jewellery, but in jewellery. It is a basic thing, like food for plants, for animals, jewellery is important for human beings, it existed for very long, and its still alive and it does not matter how the culture is changing...

M: so the concept of "contemporary" does not concern you, it s just jewellery then?

V: Well, there are differences... contemporary jewellery is also nice, because it means its "nowadays", and then there is this artistic jewellery, or jewellery art, it is also something different, so you can find a lot of names, but is the end its about jewellery and what you are doing with it. This is precisely the point, the center is very important and if you are studying, don't loose the center. Because, in the process you can turn to the periphery and explore, but you always have to come to the central point. Especially in art schools they've developed in a way, that it is expected to find a place in the periphery of the field. Because there is sort of a scene for those margins, and you make a good work, marking the territory in a way, and the work stays there somehow. But it is a very difficult position, because in former times jewellery field wanted to be perceived as art, but it didn't really work out, because it was not accepted by the art scene. The critics didn't really care, and fine art gallerists didn't really care... I mean sometimes it works out, but more as an exception, its not enough.

So it stays in this strange position, like between the two spheres. And thats why its a pity that all the talents at art schools don't work around or try to manipulate the center. So they leave it to the main stream. And its a pity because the center connects us to the daily culture. To our culture. Like ethnic jewellery of Africa: to our eyes its exotic because of its strange forms or colors, material combinations, but it fits in their culture, it reflects their daily life. The kind of nature they live in, their conditions, rituals, the whole life span... But works made on these margins of the field, its more like a dead-born child. Some things worked out, but it didn't really become a part of our culture, remaining a the small insider club of nerds.

M: So if we would talk about the future of the field, its possibilities, you are stating that its in the center, and not on the periphery?

V: For sure. All the previous achievements to show the boundaries of the field are great, they

really show what you can do and how big this area could be. But what I would like to see in the future, by students of art schools, is making direct things, that are really new or special, or interpretations of old things, but to really dive into the culture. The things you see on TV, on people, but not as some kind of example, printed in a catalogue, so you take a normal looking model and then you put this very strange thing on her or him and say: "Look, this is wearable!" And its some kind of joke! It just does not work. Its not coming from the culture...

M: When you were accepted to the Academy, you started off by making simple wire rings, but it was noted by your teachers that it resembled too much with something you see on the street market, it was too "hippie" and they required you to move away from that, to make something more conceptual. And then you came up with this piece, a ring so loaded with meanings and concepts that made your teachers very excited. You proved the point that were able to think conceptually, but then, shortly after, you came back to wire rings again! So then making this simple wire ring was more important to you then making complicated conceptual work?



Image 10

V: I started with a simple idea. At the time I was busy with making jewellery for 10 years. I worked at the goldsmith shop, and I made jewellery for myself, like this DIY punk style as a young boy. I was researching a lot about what other people did, and the culture in general, things that happened in the 80s. When in the beginning of the 90s I got accepted to the academy, I had this simple idea: I will only work with gold wire and bend over the finger and make forms out of it, and maybe later I will solder it together, or granulate it, and just develop. And I just sat there, like someone who is knitting. I could take my stuff to the meeting, underground, it was a little box with a lot of wire and I had two tools. I wanted to try all these different forms, it was for me like baking bread, something really simple. But he (Otto Kunzli) didn't like it. Things I made were not super special. He said we already did something like that, it was too "crafty", and indirectly I was told that it was not what they expect from students of an art academy. That it was kind of



Image 11





Image 12: Ruudt Peters and Aaliyah

low, stupid work, somehow. “You can do it at a flea market.” He did not see in which way I was busy with it. He only saw in my work this flea market style, but in my opinion it wasn’t...

So I was given “test time”, to prove my position in the Academy. I had to make up my mind about what I’m doing, and also I wanted to add stone to my wire rings. I made a lot of try-outs for stone cutting. I discovered a lot of tings, and from there I developed this ring, which suits Otto’s work more. He is busy with symbols like, the David’s star, svastica, and idols like Micky Mouse, so all these strong signs or symbols. So I did this ring with the cross cut out from the stone, added the golden sphere, that has form of the globe... Then when he saw it once, he said it was really good work, he was satisfied also because I was able to explain what the work was about. After this, I was accepted.

*M: but then you go back to the wire?*

V: yes I told him also, that I was going back and he laughed, he has a sense of humor, he said, now I got the “drivers license” and I can just go on. And I did, but what I noticed, I’ve lost this ethnic style, what he called “hippie” style. It was a pity. Next wire work I made was much more art school kind of style.

*M: Why do you think of it as a pity?*

V: Because for me its more interesting. Afterward I was trying to adopt the work of a fine artist that I liked into the field of jewellery. It is a normal practice for an art school, this kind of hierarchical exchange. You try to translate the vision, or working approach of somehow higher field. But sometimes it comes out stupid.

*M: Sometimes it doesn’t really translate?*

V: Yeah, but if you work in the center... The skull of Damien Hirst (For the Love of God, 2007) is in fact a good jewellery piece. But it is made by a fine artist, using the techniques, style and the meanings of the jewellery field. The work deals with death and what is after death, all the subjects jewellery dealt and deals with in former times and up until now.

*M: The key words of your work are “daily life”, “culture”, simplicity, wearability...*

V: About this “daily life”, its the word I translated from German “alltag” (translates in english like: everyday, everyday life, weekday) and with this word what I mean, is that jewellery is a part of our culture, but what was developed in our culture in the past twenty years came more from subcultures like punk with its piercings, acid house scene, pop, hip hop with its bling

bling, and so all these subcultures are influencing the jewellery field, that now a lot of main stream people wear piercings, its quite common, there is nothing strange about that. But 20-30 years ago it was a strong symbol that would scare a grandma..! And now someone is wearing a ring in their nose and it just looks nice and thats it... So that is how things become adopted by culture, but things that are shown at Marzee, or other galleries, or what people from the 80s achieved, this did not become a part of the culture. And its a pity, because all these talents, they worked into this vacuum, vacuum of this club of jewellery makers and teachers. And there is a freedom in this bubble, but you are asking me about the future and I think these artists should think more about what they want to wear, or what other people wear and find out what to use. Because these styles now becoming more and more developed, but somehow it stays outside. In our field we have the idea that there is an author and he makes a piece and that is ultimately the piece, the destination. But I think only if someone wears a jewellery piece that is precisely the moment when this pieces comes alive. Thats the thing, not in the vitrine, not in the gallery, not in the catalogue, not as an example...and then we can say that the creator, not of the jewellery, but of the whole picture, like of the person with their hair, their eyes, their hands, their pullover, their blouse, and the earrings, or the bracelet and that is the whole picture. And that is really the thing. And what we are making is only a part of it. Sometimes students make really nice tings, but they really don’t want these things to be worn. Because they say its not so nice anymore.

*M: In what sense?*

V: well, someone made a piece to which her personality is really connected with. And she came to the point that thats really nice. Thats my treasure. And then its really hard to give it away. And not only to give it away, but in this case all that you’ve put in stays in the third or forth row, place... Because when worn on the body, always the person, the wearer comes first, and only then this added thing. So when someone puts all their love, all their knowledge into the piece it just not enough... And then you are never really satisfied. And thats why all these big talents, and all these jewellery artists often put something in, that makes it somehow difficult to wear. They want it to be seen as a “super piece”, and they, as creators would bee seen

as high and respected, but thats not the sense of the thing. Because the girl or the man who wears this piece is the king!

*M: So, we are heading towards this image?*

*( image. XX Ruudt Peters and Aaliyah)*

V: Yeah, its about how they wear this jewellery. I’ve never seen anyone wearing something like this. Mask is a nice object, but I don’t know if it fits to the body. The whole outfit, the glasses, they work together very well to create the image, but the jewellery piece becomes this alien, strange thing, somehow... Then the singer, she wears jewellery in a very simple way, and its easy to see what the function of the jewellery is. That it really becomes this decoration for her body, leading the eye of the viewer in a very sexual way. And thats what jewellery is often about!

*M: Or all about?*

V: Or maybe you can say is all about! But its not only about sexuality. The problem with the man is: man dies... And jewellery stands for the idea that you can live longer. They are putting these gold rings into the grave... or if you like a butterfly, you can replicate it in jewellery and wear this summer moment next winter... Going back to the singer, she is also wearing this bracelet, and maybe it makes sound, and she has her hand on her hips, showing it off.

*M: So its all working for her?*

V: Yes, its just working for her, there is nothing about the author, about who made this and why, its just for her...

*M: So what happens with the ego of the maker? At this point, it must be just thrown away?*

V: Yes. Sometimes with clothes for example, its important who made it. Or, for example like at “Breakfast at Tiffany’s”: the Tiffany is a sign for something luxurious. Even the girl on the street eating fast food in the film, she knows, Tiffany is that thing! Its all about wearing/adding something that is special to you. Its like killing a lion and then wearing its fur, so it gives its power to the wearer.

In a way, its the same with Chanel, Bulgari its this gold and precious stones that give you the power, the status, etc.

*M: What are the driving forces in your work?*

V: There are some possibilities. Sometimes I work, because I have a knowledge to make nice things, and in general, professionally, I try to make nice things. But sometimes the work is driven from an emotion, like rage, hate or love, and then in that moment something really comes out. And then the work has a lot of impact. And people often realize that there is something there. They don’t necessarily know what that is, but they can feel it without someone having to explain the work. Sometimes its very strong and I feel I could use it, but its like a musical live performance, its never really same ever again... On regular bases I work form my knowledge or my aesthetics.

*M: Its funny, how you can never trigger the same emotion, and people always can tell which one is the first piece.*

V: And that is also about these wire rings. How I was trying to translate Allan Mccollum work into the jewellery. That was for me very important, that sometimes I make jewellery by hand, and it fits really good, and it works like a drawing or something and I want to do same thing second time and it was not possible, because the nod was in the wrong place, or the proportion was not working... It happens often especially with drawing, making the same drawing the second time is not possible. To remake an oil painting is maybe simpler...

Interview #2  
'Sometimes yellow, sometimes brown'  
Ulrich Reithofer  
04.03.2011

*Marina Elenskaya: Imagine going back to Austria and meeting an old classmate who became a wealthy farmer. He is asking you what do you do?*  
Ulrich Reithofer: I live in Amsterdam; I make jewellery. Mainly unique pieces. I use gold and also precious materials, but I also use a lot of other stuff like wood, glass, etc.  
*M.E.: What would be the definition for you: I'm a contemporary artist, I'm a jeweller, I'm a craftsman?*  
U.R.: I am contemporary because I'm now. And I'm a jeweller because that's what I'm aiming for, is to be carried away, taken with someone. That the work is possibly given as a present with meaning of something related to jewellery: birthday, wedding, or engagement... I just made a ring for a new born baby and his mother and this is how I'm a jeweller.  
*M.E.: Why did you choose jewellery as a medium? Why not expressing yourself through sculpture?*  
U.R.: Well, I anyway do sculpture, because a ring is a sculpture, brooch is a sculpture; parts of a necklace are always sculptural. But sculpture is based on the ground, there is a relation to the human body in size, but it is based somewhere and stays there.  
The jewellery is somehow worn and at a certain moment comes to the body and creates this personal relation with the body, it communicates only through the body. And the sculpture would not do that.  
*M.E.: So the act of wear is important for you, it's not to be sitting in the box or hang on the wall?*  
U.R.: It is OK for me, but the object that I make; this sculpture has to imply the use. Even if it's not wearable, even if it hurts when worn, then there is a statement about the non-wearability. But the human relation that lies in dimension to the body is important.  
*M.E.: About the work itself, how it looks now and what it embodies, how did you come to this?*  
U.R.: It's about putting things in a different perspective. Say, the chair, we know it as a furniture object in the room. What happens to the object in the room when it's worn on the body? It's the irritation that communicates. I think jewellery has to irritate to work. It has to be something that does not physically belong to you. It is not a pimple on your thumb, or a scratch on your cheek. It is something strange, but then does it communicate? Sometimes it just doesn't. But sometimes someone will ask: "Why does she wear a fucking chair?!" That would mean I achieved my goal — I started a communication.  
*M.E.: When did this goal come into work?*  
U.R.: I think it started in Idar-Oberstein. I made brooches with ready-made safety pins. It was an easy way out. I made pieces, but then I wanted to connect them to the body somehow. So what is the easy way? Take a safety pin and just stick your clothes! Then Theo (Theo Smiths, Professor at Idar-Oberstein) said, this is not true jewellery, because you use something existing and then put it to your artwork in order to connect it to the body. So then I decided to justify the safety pin as my means to jewellery. To prove that I'm allowed to do this, because that is what I wanted to do: use a ready-made together with my creation to get carried around on the body. Then I made this piece: it was a golden frame

for a painting; on the back there was a safety pin, nailed with about 100 nails. And on the lower part, where you usually have a title of the painting it said, cut out of silver: "Ambitiously covered safety pin as a piece of jewellery". So a lot of work invested into something that is just a safety pin. I realized I could do anything I want as long as it is a "round thing", as long as it makes sense.  
*M.E.: So how did things proceed in Sandberg?*  
U.R.: Idar-Oberstein was only about jewellery. There is only one academy dedicated to jewellery, and there was not much to talk about besides jewellery. And all art got somehow integrated from a point of view of jewellery. At Sandberg it changed completely. Suddenly I saw that concerns with the condition of the discipline happen in every field. If you are an architect, you also "find yourself" in the field that is "dying out" and there is "no future", and the ceramists, glass artists, etc. have the same problem. You don't see that this field is so much bigger then you, then your school, your education... My graduation piece for the Rietveld was collaboration with a theatre school graduate. And she did a theatre performance and asked me if I could make jewellery for her show, which meant making the stage. So I was hanging lamps, throwing cables around, had a little jewellery show at the entrance... Collaborations are what I do and I think is important for my work.  
*M.E.: So if making sculpture or theatre design also counts, then it's not about making only wearable work?*  
U.R.: You've asked me to give you a visualization of the field, which gave me some pain... Because it very difficult to see us as a field for me. I see us more as a color. I see jewellery as a color, as much as architecture as a color, as much as painting as a color, as much as music as a color. We are a strong color and we tend to mix, we love to go with the blue, with the red, and the more we mix, the more we loose form our main source, main color.  
*M.E.: Which is the color for you?*  
U.R.: Sometimes Yellow, sometimes Brown... For me all the jewellery schools are one color. And some want to blend with the Red of Sculpture, so someone goes into the sculpture, someone goes into architecture, someone goes into fashion, music etc. But the stronger you realize your own color the stronger you can blend in with other colors. Without loosing your own. That's why I try to blend in with these purple theatre people, blue architects and orange photographers, because it's interesting and it comes back into my own discipline. I think its very important that each individual finds its own blending. I think there are so many more jewellery intellectuals now compared to the time when Otto Kunzli started. Pigment became so much stronger; there are so many particles in our color. And of course we can blend easier with other colors.  
*M.E.: So you see it as a virtue?*  
U.R.: Yes, absolutely. Many of these attempts might not be successful, and maybe I will find myself blending with too many other colors that my original color either will fade away, or... I will find my own in-between color that is only mine.  
*M.E.: So you are not concerned with loosing ourselves at the mercy of these great fields that might not even recognize jewellery?*  
U.R.: No, think about it. I am sure there is now somewhere in the world a young painting student talking to another more experienced

painter. They are having exactly the same conversation as we have. I don't think we have to be insecure. This exists much more in fashion for example, because it is so much bigger. To get to the height of Galliano who is a lot in the media right now, you have to fight so much harder than you have to fight as a jeweller! In the end we can say we came a long way and have a higher potential than Otto Kunzli had in his time.  
*M.E.: The struggles are different. For example Herman Junger. He had to break out of the German traditional school. Breaking symmetry, smooth surfaces. That was his main concern. Proving them wrong.*  
U.R.: It could be we are further now, but maybe we are still at the same spot.  
*M.E.: We came to a full circle. Herman Junger breaking off from the craft and tradition and our nowadays search to get back to them and revive the craft.*  
U.R.: Nowadays we try to speed up the process a little bit, making things that are glued, and stringed together, but the expression is there. The piece has to be out, has to be seen and worn. The excitement of creation is great. But now the piece falls apart because the primary concern was not finishing, but expressing!



Image 13: Ulrich Reithofer. Image taken from Op Voorraad; [www.op-voorraad.com](http://www.op-voorraad.com)

So now there is another step to be made: I want to keep the same look but how do I manage for it to become a durable piece? This is recognizable as a problem that every artist has. One step forward and two steps back. If you use new materials, as an architect, it is possible that the house could collapse.  
*M.E.: So, the way you relate to craft is more a way of shaping a message?*  
U.R.: Well yes, but now I only start to regret that I cheated a little a bit on my education. I missed out on things that I got the paper for. Now I find out that some of these skills I really need.  
*M.E.: Like what?*  
U.R.: Cutting a straight line, finally fucking straight! Now I find myself calling someone to do it for me. Which is fine to a certain extent: you also have to find a way to supply that. The money and calls I need to make to get it done. Is



ing a set of good skills. I don't need to know them in the beginning. But in the moment I start to mess around a with stones, it gets interesting how people did it back in the day... In general craft is under-evaluated. Bauhaus was communicating the idea that "by saying you can't teach art you are saying you have to learn the craft".<sup>1</sup> Walter Gropius said: "We train a new generation of architects by not teaching architecture", but by teaching them how to make furniture, masonry, how to use wood, stone etc. They had a point I think. They go back to the basics of what makes you a good creator. There is so much confusion out there... I created a small brooch and it gives you, me, and someone who is watching a little piece of silence in this whole chaos. You want to take apart this big thing into smaller symbols, so it gets graspable. So you start to understand the world step by step: how blue and green work together, how triangle and a circle work together — and that's craft.

M.E.: *Where does the source of you work lay?*

U.R.: It is the chaos out there that I don't know how to handle without making things I can grasp, making them visual and then communicate with others: "Do you see the world like me? Understand it like me? Oh, good! You see it different? Also good!". This is the subject it all comes down to.

M.E.: *You put a lot of meanings in your work. It is full of information. I chose these three of your works: (see img 12 13 14) For me those work are about the wearability, because something happens in the wearing.*

U.R.: It's interesting that you chose these three, because they all mark a period of time: One was the first after Idar-Oberstein, second one was my first after Sandberg, and the third is my first solo show. It shows what I'm looking for in the collier: its a closed circle, like a movie or a symphony: you starting somewhere, you give the introduction, then you develop the theme, you come to the main part and then you let it clean out — that's a collier. And of course in each work I make, I try to emphasize one story. Sometimes I mess up and tell three. But if I manage, I tell one story. In "Hope" it's about two families, mama, papa and a daughter. Parents raise you and now its time you are pushed out, suddenly you start walking on your own. That is how I felt at the time. I started to study at Idar-Oberstein because I wanted to work with stone, but after two years the amount of stonework decreased and the amount of wood-carving and sculptural elements increased. So here I have a big sculptural part that is wood and around it there are these stones, with hope that one day I'll come back to the stone. Also, the concept of hope is always identified with the color green, but I'm not sure its correct, so I made a black collier with pink stones.

M.E.: *I think it is a heavy piece, in many ways. When I first saw it, I thought carrying such a heavy story on the body is somewhat ground-breaking.*

U.R.: There is a constant discussion in our field on when does a piece of jewellery become unwearable by carrying too much personal information. I'm very aware of that. Because the second piece is so fucking personal I don't even want to talk about it! But I was lucky that there is a certain element to it that made it more general. M.E.: *I don't think its luck or magic, its actually quite logical that if you are working with something highly personal and strong for you, the viewer can relate to this high concentration on emotional level without having to know the original story.*

U.R.: Its like Mozart's Requiem. He is so emo-



Image 14: Necklace Hope

tionally wrecked by the death of his father, that Salieri knows he will die making this piece. And no matter when and where you hear this piece, it no longer relates to Mozart, it relates personally to you.

M.E.: *So you feel that you have achieved that somehow?*

U.R.: I'm working on it. Which means I create, I pile things up, and then I start to cut away, in the process I try to stay as communicative as possible and then show work to the people I trust. And they tell me what they see. Sometimes it does not tell the story, but sometimes HA..! It does not tell my story, it tells THE story! "Conspiracy" was made in time of crisis. Its about the few big ones that tell us how we are so little. But the minute we create a group we a stronger. And that is what I see happening in our field. We don't now where are we going, because there is no compound, no group development, no manifestos. There is no giving up personal achievements for the sake of common achievements in order to understand what is important for the field. Instead we see individual points of view, personal understand-



Image 15: Necklace

ing of certain problems. Up until the beginning of the twentieth century as a painter you were a part of a movement. And we are a part of a big movement, but no one knows what it is because no one can define it as a whole.

M.E.: *It happens because of the fact that there is no critical discourse in the field?*

U.R.: There is no hierarchy. No one is busy with analyzing facts as, for example: "So-and-so started this movement then and there, these people have followed, and made this development, and that's why this piece has certain significance". It hardly ever happens in this way. And I feel that in fine arts of fashion the popularity of the field is so high that certain people instead of making start writing about it. And as a maker you are busy with communicating with the work, rather then communicating with words. So if one wants do dedicate himself to

writing, he learns the skills and begins writing. But I'm not giving up my career, and it happens in all the jewellery schools. There are so many talented people there, but no one wants to swap over to the verbal, intellectual part. And that's why they founded the "Accademia del Disegno" in Rome, the first school dedicated to teaching art. They wanted to create a verbal language to the language of art. They wanted to find a verbalization of what is happening visually.

M.E.: *Manifestos and writing about your position within the field made people like Herman Junger and Otto Kunzli more important and weighty.*



Image 16: Necklace Conspiracy

U.R.: Exactly. So if you had a manifesto you would be more appreciated. Its like the impressionists have put down into words that they want to paint outside because they are sick of the studio light. And people who perceive art through verbal language first will always dig something where they are more intellectually stimulated. So the Impressionism becomes immediately successful because there was a clear manifesto, where they stated their ideas. And that's the moment when it becomes more open to "mixing with other colors". I start painting and I immediately call my writer friend to come over, drink some wine and talk about my work. We shall step out of our circles and deal with other people. We have to start involving others in order to grow. The future is bright. The field is infinite. You can learn and apply any science, craft, and philosophy to jewellery making. The beauty is in these infinite possibilities and openness. You have Schmuck in Munich, where you see latest developments of the contemporary jewellery, but few weeks before that there is Inhorgenta1, a huge fair of craft jewellery, and it is also valid, it has its place.

M.E.: *What is a perfect piece of jewellery?*

U.R.: Perfect Jewel. For me the first perfect jewel I saw was a "Tear Bucket" by Dinie Besems. It was a very simple shape. A black ring. On top of it sits a little black cup. And this cup is to contain a tear. And because of water's qualities to round up due to its surface tension, the top becomes a perfect bead: on the bottom - metal, on top -



water. "Tear Bucket". The title and the picture make you cry when you see it. For me it is a perfect jewel.

Image 17: Ring Tear Bucket by Dinie Besems



Marina Elenskaya: What is jewellery?

Manfred Bischoff: I must say it in German: "Kunst ist eine behauptung".<sup>1</sup> That means I stand for it. Totally. The other thing is that I claim what jewellery is. And the third thing is — I must over-live jewellery. "Behauptung" means staying behind what is jewellery and over-living it. If I stay with what I'm doing, I must take all the consequences. So the question is not what is jewellery. This question is not important. I think it's important to use no adjectives. It's a "behauptung". I say this is jewellery and I stay behind it. Even if it's stupid. But it is a controlled stupidity.

M.E.: What is controlled stupidity?

M.B.: If you are stupid, you are probably not inside the field. But I control my stupidity. The work is a work of a fool, but a controlled fool. I know what I'm doing; I know what is behind the work. The other thing is - I'm not interested in other worlds (ex. fine arts). If someone follows me in this world, and says: I accept this as jewellery then it's OK. A famous philosopher said, "Art for me is what I declare as art". It is a little bit like me. Jewellery for me is what I declare jewellery. I cannot influence others to agree. So I must concentrate my highest knowing, concepts I developed throughout my life... and do nothing! Do nothing. That's the result. (laughing) I'm not interested in doing important things. For me the most important thing is to do nothing. So things disappear.

M.E.: Is it about "1 + 6 + 7 = 14 = 0"?<sup>1</sup>

M.B.: Exactly! But I use the material that has no concurrence, maybe only by Tutankhamen!

M.E.: Talking about materiality, you once said that the use of cheap materials in the beginning of your career for you meant rehearsal, the try-out before finding and developing your own language.

M.B.: There is a bad word for jewellery. It's called decoration. It was high decoration. It was close to other fields, like art, philosophy, literature, but it was too much wanted.

M.E.: So gold gave you freedom?

M.B.: Yes. I cannot live from steel pieces. Gold is an adequate material for my thinking. That's all. Everyone who is creative should search for his adequate material. And in my case it's gold. And it's not even about it being gold. It is high precious gold. That means all the shit you see in the world that is called gold is 18K. The dealers of the jewellery industry are making their money by calling it gold.

Gold must be clear. But there is a sacrifice to be made. I cannot use pure gold, because I need certain kind of rigidity for being able to work with it. So I have to come down to 22k gold. That is my sacrifice. Gold for me is much to do with the past, with older generations, and one should not make money from this.

M.E.: So it is a pure substance. The purity you would not be able to achieve with any other material.

M.B.: Yes. It is the only material that is ready for a change. The old human way to over-live is to begin this change. You cannot give a little bit of gold. You must give real gold; and then gold will be what it is. It never leaves you. If I have gold here I can immediately change it in another way. I don't have to do anything to

clean it and etc. It's like clear water. In this way gold "goldens". My titles can be cheap, but I "golden" them. And I can get very very foolish, again, controlled foolish, by doing it in gold.

M.E.: And what role coral plays in your work?

M.B.: I didn't have a good life when I was young. And I often had wounds in my soul and in my body. And there is a famous sentence from Joseph Beuys, a title from a work: "Show your wound"<sup>3</sup> and that is a little bit what it is about. I show my wound, I show that I was wounded in my life. And then I cover them with gold. But it is enough, if I see the depth, the whole story, and the viewer must not look too deep, it is better to stay on the surface.

M.E.: I wrote this in the train: "For me the work is poetry of high and low: effortlessness and fluency in art, philosophy and cheap porn".

M.B.: One can say this, yes.

M.E.: The material in this case ties all these things together: weird sexual thoughts, funny, stupid, ridiculous, along with highly philosophical. I think titles play also really important role here?

M.B.: It has no sense to name a piece by what is already there, what you can see. It has to be something else. But what is it?

M.E.: Exactly! Is it to mislead the viewer, to help or to confuse him?

M.B.: I think it's better to confuse him. It should look to him as if it would help. So what he reads is not what he reads... But I'm not tricking him, not leaving him alone. I have experienced that people who bought my pieces had their own private names for them. So they stopped using my title. And I allow this. It's fine. The work is no longer my responsibility.

M.E.: Lets talk about presenting work for public viewing. The work always consists of three parts. First, there is a drawing, then, there is the actual jewellery piece, and finally, there is the title. What is your strategy here concerning the viewer?

M.B.: The viewer shall not find the "hole". He always wants the way out. But it is very foolish to find the "hole". And by "hole" I mean solution, a certain kind of solution. Everyone is finding their own solutions, and its OK. The solution should seem easy. There are no adjectives. It is what you see.

M.E.: How much a jewellery piece can handle?

How much personal weight, how much political or social weight and does it need all that at all?

M.B.: One can force with language. You can

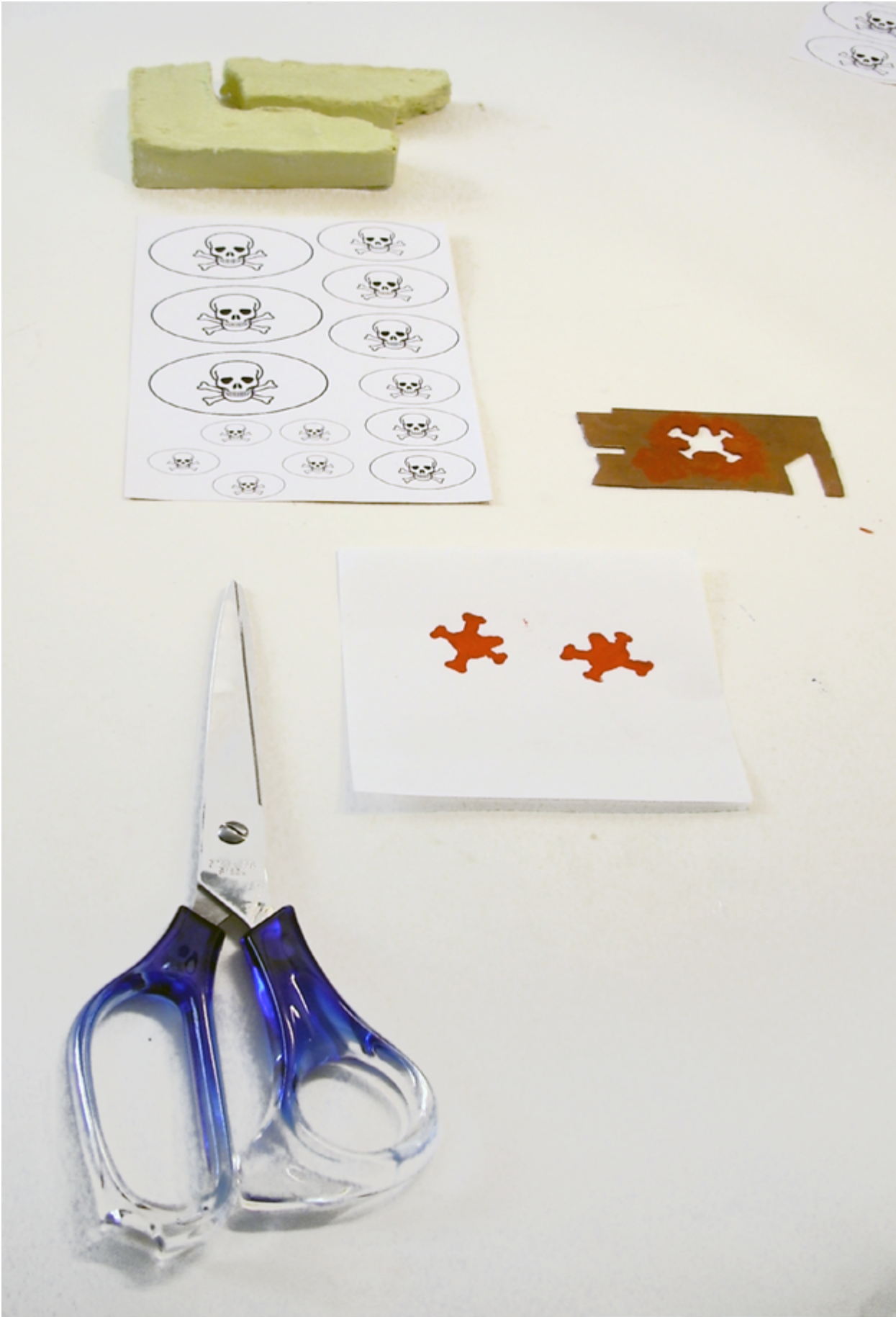


Image 18: taken by Alchimia's former student Geri Nishi during Bischoff's class



force any kind of substantive under certain circumstances. But I'm not interested in these on television I see how wrongly they use the language, and nobody says anything about it. So I am very careful in using important titles. Titles which look important. Never in history the language was used as badly as nowa-days. So I try to use simple things. But simple things are not coming from thin air. If I read a newspaper or a book I find exactly the word I need; and I immediately have the result. In reality. In the making. There are a lot of things I'm collecting, pictures, cutouts from books, newspapers, posters; this is my database, my blueprint. There are a lot of secrets in here, about where things are coming from and so on. Some of these stories are silly looking, but for me they mean something more. Things fall together, come down to one point for me. I'm not searching; I'm just reading newspapers. That's all. I see wrong sentences and that is what I'm interested in. I see how people derogate words that are really important. I try to protect these words and give them a new frame in gold. Every case is different from another, it is not systematic, it's inner. I'm reading one day and: "Oh, Jesus, now I have it!"

I want to tell you a story. There is this guy who went to the house of Junger. House built of mirrors. He found a document, a medical prescription for an old medicine that says: "immer jünger".<sup>4</sup> Always younger, so Junger was using the medicine that was called Always Younger. These are the things I'm interested in. When reality collides with stupidity, some kind of absurd. This point of collision is my place, my realm.

M.E.: *Do not wait to act...If you are ready?*<sup>5</sup>

M.B.: During my artist residency at Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston they told me to search for a piece from their collection and make a reference to it. So I went to the Museum and there was the Hercules of Piero Della Francesca, and I decided to use it because it was not a real Hercules, but more of a slimy boy. It was a fresco, which they took from the wall of Della Francesca's house. On the backside of the fresco he wrote, "Do not wait to act...If you are ready". But in the museum you cannot see it anymore, I found the evidence of it in the restorer's reports and it is very important. This pre-explosive waiting before the action - it has no sense to do something without a key. Sometimes to begin a process, to search for solutions, try things out and then say, if one can use it or not. But as I said before, I'm not using adjectives. I'm saying: "I make this if I'm ready," Then - I do it. Waiting for this explosive moment is important. But you must be prepared and then act immediately. Not waiting until tomorrow - act immediately. For me it became a very important sentence. But the question follows is when are you ready? It is a question for oneself; it is not coming from the outside. Question Am I Ready? I think one must come to a certain inner confusion. Then either I hold this con-

fusion or I try and solve it. So the confusion for me is the sign of readiness, because one must find the way out - to regulate it. Either you write it down, or you sing a song etc. It is called supplementation

M.E.: *The driving force in your work is Eros, what is it for you exactly?*

M.B.: Eros is not sex. Sex can be a final solution. Eros is a never-ending junkie journey of the visible. If someone takes away the images of the world I think I would die. That's the end. I am totally not interested in fake images, but there comes my aesthetic choice that I allow my eyes to only see the best. There is also a decision to push other things away. So I keep only interesting images in my head, all the others have no place. Images create Self; I'm not creating images. They are my hope. And it is a never-ending story. Someone says: "I found a solution!" How stupid, I never found a solution! I have my own aesthetic and within this aesthetic there lays value. I can tell that my aesthetic is widely spread, that means I saw a lot of things. So one cannot say to me that I saw nothing, that I read only one newspaper. It is a matter of age. I am not anymore so easily influenced. But it does not mean that I'm strong. It just means that at a certain point I realized I spent so much time doing something, what else shall I do? I often think about this. OK, I can be a good cook, but starting now... I don't know. What I like about living here in Florence, is that the way things are has a lot to do with my thinking and my work: there is a terrible restaurant, somebody opens it and the food is not good, but its food. I like this very much. I think that's the world. Other things are not important. I think in Munich you cannot eat in any place as cheap and as good as at San Frediano. These are the solutions for the world, not the high and polished... M.E.: *When I was in my second year of Alchimia, I didn't know if I should continue to the third year. So I asked teachers if I could be present on one of your lectures.*

*It was towards the end of the year, so people were showing quite developed work.*

*You were giving critique to one of the third year students - Gerri Nishi — she made this cement block. To demonstrate your position, you simply picked up this block, put a pair of scissors under it, and then just took another student's work and put it in the same line.*

*After a long pause, you said: "You see?" And I thought I really saw! Something you cannot really describe with words, but it was there!*

M.B.: It works. It was an example for complex view, not certain view. Things can work and have a big aesthetic even if they don't belong together: they have no sense - that's how it works. They are beautiful look at it! So to take away this concentration on the spot, like on the stage - that is what I always do.

The most important thing is to describe the difference. If I have another example, I can tell which one has higher quality, so I can conclude the direction to continue with. And that is my way of teaching and my way of thinking.

M.E.: *So it is not about what they say individually, but more about what they say as a sequence?*

M.B.: I can see things immediately complex: the complexity of a whole.

M.E.: *For me it is also about how you taught us small things: that the line shall never be even, it must be nervous and sketchy, like a pencil drawing, even if its made of metal.*

M.B.: I have a strange thinking, which is not common; it all comes from my personal story and experiences I've been through.

What I tell students, as a teacher is always a result of what they show me. I can immediately react on it, I have a lot of ways of entering the situation (someone's work); my reaction never comes from one place. I must be very quick in my reaction, because I should not think too much. So sometimes I also said stupid, wrong, rude things, but as long as the reaction is immediate, even with these wrong notions, I get closer to the source. It is always important for me as a teacher, to come from the outside, not too close to the work or the persons. The other thing is a will to make a difference - to say: "This is better than this." I cannot say if something is good, if I have nothing next to it.

M.E.: *It was always about groups of pieces, try-outs on the table, where you were re-grouping things, putting stuff away. One cannot judge from a single piece, because it does not say anything.*

M.B.: At the very end - one piece or two...that is very successful.

M.E.: *It's this constant peeling, like a cabbage... I remember in the book "Üb ersetzen" you said; "If I had to reduce everything, I would say that that's what it's all about. Breathing in and breathing out, the entrance and the exit".*

M.B.: It also comes from my story. I had a serious depression in the past, and when I asked my psychiatrist: "where is the exit", he immediately replied — "at the entrance". Ever since I never had problems with finding the exit. It's very clear, very easy. You always find the exit at the entrance. You must not search for the exit; you will always find it at the entrance. The question and the answer are both very precise. For me it's a very deep experience and if I would have to name an accumulation of thoughts, I would say this is the most important sentence in my life.

1 Translates from German language as: "Art is a claim"

2 "Üb ersetzen", 1993: "No matter how important the image or text, the synthesis of those elements always leads to nothing. 1 + 6 + 7 — 14 = 0. The works simply dissolve."

3 Show Your Wound" was an installation created by Beuys in 1974-75 in a bleak pedestrian underpass in Munich.

4 Translates from German language as: "Always younger"

5 While his residency in 2002 at Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Bischoff was asked to react to one of the pieces in the collection. He chose a fresco by Piero Della Francesca. The result was the brooch titled Or-Son

PRESENTATION

In the previous chapter we touched upon the notion of wear and its use as a logical destination for a piece of jewellery. Yet there is another big realm that has to do with showing and promoting work — presentation. Two key elements of presentation are:

Photography  
Exhibition

Creation of one-offs and of small series are common in the discipline of Contemporary Jewellery, despite wide discussions on new technologies, like laser cutting and 3D printing, that would suggest mass production. Working on pieces often requires time and skill and many makers prefer it that way. Piece of jewellery is still considered unique if it is produced in small series: up to 7-10 copies. Consequently, the work can be purchased and seen by relatively small amount of people. The solution of this problem was found through the means of the Internet (websites, blogs, forums, collectives, online portfolios, etc.) and promotional publications. Pieces are mostly well photographed before being sold and later this data is used in promotional purposes. Limited production dictates well-developed practice of documentation. Some artists take pictures of the work themselves, some — ask for professional help. Common and accepted way of photographing work is against white background with minor shadows, creating almost floating-in-the-air effect (see image XX) This way of documentation has to do with how the artists want the work to be perceived. In many cases jewellery appears like a work of art, an object, nature of which remains uncertain. This approach to jewellery presentation has little to do with its wearability, scale, and



Image 19: Work by Rinaldo Alvarez, 1971,

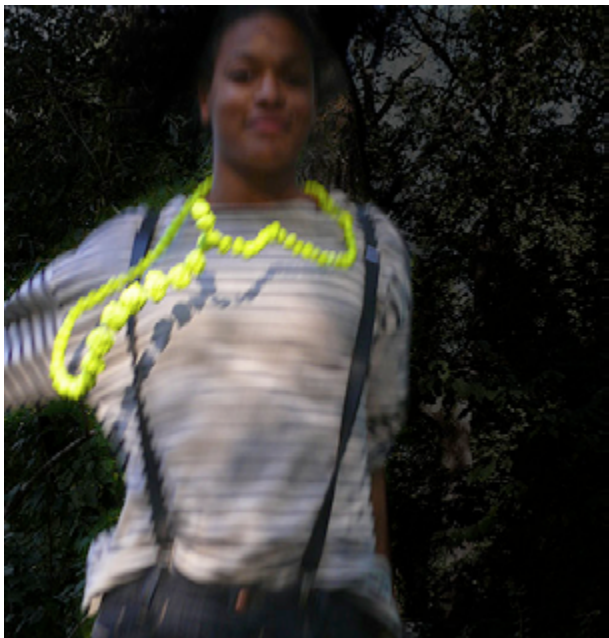


Image 20: Poster for the exhibition Explosive: Frozen Fireworks, Mia Maljojoki PLATINA, Stockholm, Sweden, 2010

functionality - all the more so for the general public, which is unfamiliar with aesthetics of Contemporary Jewellery. Nowadays photography not only becomes a means of presentation, but a part of the language communicating the vision of the artist (see image XX). It's becoming more important not to fall into trends of fashion photography. Artists acknowledged photography as a tool of expression, which really needs to become part of the work as a whole. As from the point of view of general public, it seems more logical to see jewellery in context of the human body that helps the viewer establish a relationship with dimensions and scale of the work. As I touched upon earlier, due to the limited production of work tools of presentation, such as photography, publication and exhibition are vital for artists to acquire recognition. Being a part of Contemporary Jewellery community artists are usually presented by few galleries in different countries. Once every couple of years a gallery invites artists to have either a group or a solo shows. The artists, using existing or acquiring new means and materials of display, do the exhibition design. Few times a year major galleries participate in the art, craft and design fairs around the world. The presentation means there are limited to the design requirements of each fair and given space. Most of the time galleries have fair displays, which they use over and over again each year. So how do artists and galleries exhibit Contemporary Jewellery? Most of the time there is a striking difference between the two. During events like Shmuck in Munich<sup>15</sup>, artists are given space to organize their own shows and those exhibitions are most witty and memorable. Often smaller jewellery exhibitions are included in the map of the larger events like design weeks, festivals, etc. Given artistic freedom to show in different locations around the city, places like markets, libraries, cafes, and bookshops are chosen. Jewellery is presented in more casual way, often worn by the owners and workers of the place. This friendly context insures the curiosity from the general public and possible

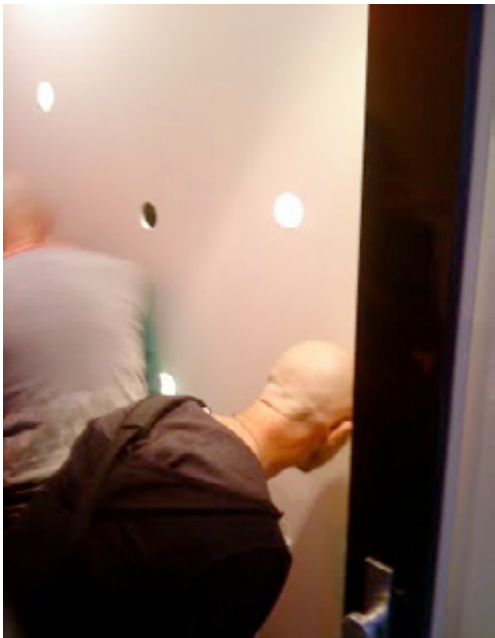


Image 21: Exhibition view of Come Closer , 2010

sales. Artists use presentational tools to communicate the whole concept of the exhibition. For instance, exhibition “Come Closer” by students of Gerrit Rietveld Academie at the Red Light District in Amsterdam during the Dutch Design Week in 2009 was inspired by the peep show. Jewellery was placed behind the wall and viewers could only see pieces through small holes. Here jewellery is seen as an object of voyeuristic desire; presentation that really plays on a natural curiosity of the public. Presentation at it's best can become an active tool of expression and communication. The exhibition of the A5 collective (Annika Pettersson, Romina Fuentes, and Adam Grinovich) called “Aeon Profit - Piano Forte” is basically demounted pianoforte, cut and re-arranged in hundreds of pieces, from which the jewellery is made. The presentation of the result is impressive. Hundreds of pieces took up the whole gallery (see image 22) space from the floor up to the ceiling, showing not only the cohesive outcome in the work of three individuals, but also demonstrating a treasure, common devaluated object can offer. The diversity and wit of artist's own presentations, however differs a lot from the tradition of the gallery display. Constricted by issues of insurance and safety, most galleries prefer more conservative exhibition means, museum-like glass vitrines where jewellery is out of physical reach of the viewer. Needless to say, this way of presenting does not reach far beyond existing clientele — people familiar with Contemporary Jewellery, regular buyers, collectors, who are not intimidated by the unfriendly look of display. General public, visitors of design fairs are misled by the seeming unaffordability of the jewellery. It is indeed not glass displays, but a psychological barrier and that separates us from our potential clients. Jewellery requires a physical contact as its function is tightly attached to a certain intimacy in relation to the human body. “Experiencing” jewelry is the most exiting and memorable gift jewellery can grant.

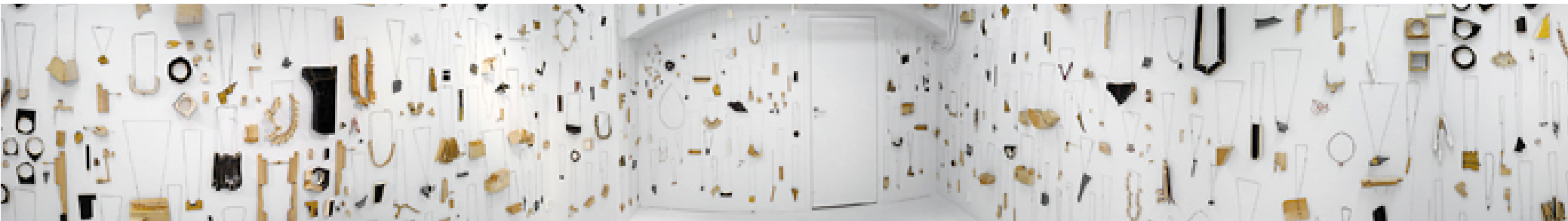


Image 22: “Piano Forte - Aeon Profit” was shown at Galleri Platina, Stockholm Sweden 2010 and at the International Handwork Exhibition, Munich 2011



## REFLEXIVITY

Contemporary Jewellery community is a relatively small group of people. Few important annual events take place and everyone gathers to say hello. Everyone knows all major galleries and schools and few accomplished celebrated makers keep making rounds with their workshops and lectures. Nevertheless, every year hundreds of students graduate from different schools all around the world as certified jewellery artists/designers. Every year the community grows and more and more events and collaborations take place. Over the past few years a notion of trends came to life, which was greeted with disapproval, but it seems to me as a positive sign of growth. Major schools teaching jewellery acquired their own philosophy and style and the enrollees are well aware of what kind of aesthetic or approach they are signing up for when applying for those schools. Emerging countries like South America and Eastern Europe are expanding the field even more, following aesthetics of West European schools and acquiring their own, based on cultural and historical legacy.

Contemporary Jewellery is a relatively new discipline with undefined genres of expression. Having a human body as an ultimate framework, lot of freedom is given for an individual artistic expression. However, undoubtedly, one can notice distinct trends, styles and genres within the field: working with symbols, investigating particular materials, decontextualizing existing objects, investigating jewellery as a subject, etc. There are also more general concerns with form, concept, value, wearability, etc. Notions of representational, abstract or abstracted form are familiar to the jewellery discipline. Influences from painting, sculpture, architecture, photography and consequently larger artistic concepts seep through the border of the discipline, constantly changing and supplementing it. A big part of starting a critical analysis is to trace back the historical development of these influences, tie them to certain place, time, people, etc. Describing the field of Contemporary Jewellery, Ulrich Reithofer says: “There is no hierarchy. No one is busy with analyzing facts as, for example: “So-and-so started this movement then and there, these people have followed, and made this development, and that’s why this piece has certain significance””. Trying to trace back existing trends I found it curious to realize that the diversity of genres comes from the entrenched teaching traditions of Art institutions, where Contemporary Jewellery is taught.

Depending on their geographical location, some schools are inevitably more interested in certain materials and techniques; for example, a German school located in Idar-Oberstein, a town, once famous for its agate and jasper deposits, with still functional gem mine, is famous for its outstanding stonework jewellery, intricate and skilled stone-cutting, etc. Some schools, like Hiko Mizuno College of Jewelry in Tokyo, are attuned to new technologies and cutting-edge materials, which inevitably influences the work of the students. Gerrit Rietveld Academie has attained a strong position in the Contemporary Jewellery field due to generations of extraordinary professors and general teaching approach, based on conceptual investigation, process and experimentation. Another important factor in this trend-setting process is the influence of individual professors and leaders of jewellery programs. It is a common practice for students to start, in one way or another, follow the work of their professors. Strong and developed language of the teacher becomes visible in the working attempts of his/her pupils.

If we conclude that genres originate in schools and get carried out for years by its former students: developed, modified, re-thought, yet traceable - it could mean a strong possibility for a potential critical analysis outlining existing genres in the field. Finding a language to analyze jewellery, to trace the tendencies, influences have far more importance than defining it in relation to Fine Art or Applied Art only. The discipline needs to find its own history and tradition, and as far as I’m concerned, schools of jewellery shall be the starting point of this attempt. In his interview Ulrich Reithofer talks about the necessity of finding an appropriate language for critical analysis of Contemporary Jewellery. He mentions “Academia Del Disegno” in Rome, the first school dedicated to teaching art, he says: “They wanted to create a verbal language to the language of art. They wanted to find a verbalization of what is happening visually.” He also mentions larger fields, like fashion or design. There, conditions of extreme competition,

market-orientation and quality standards draw a certain line between those who are able to “survive” and those who choose the intellectual side of highlighting and analyzing the field. Reithofer elaborates: “... as a maker you are busy with communicating with the work, rather than communicating with words. So if one wants to dedicate him/herself to writing, learns the skills and begins writing. But I’m not giving up my career, and it happens in all the jewellery schools. There are so many talented people there, but no one wants to swap over to the verbal, intellectual part.” Practice of writing about the work is almost as important as making the work itself. Above all, writing about the work is about defining a position, finding one’s standing point and defending it. Most of the texts written by artists consist of a brief paragraph or so of mostly very vague artistic mumbo jumbo, purpose of which remains uncertain. Plenty examples of such can be found on Internet platforms, dedicated to jewellery, like Klimt02.<sup>16</sup> Let’s look at a statement placed underneath images of finished work of a young artist, which name remains anonymous, as I don’t intend this as a personal, but rather general investigation.

*“The creative process is the introversion. Consciousness and subconsciousness are in dialogue with each other. It is a Seen and Not-seen, spoken and unspoken, as well as experienced and dreamed. The intuition perceives the concealed possibilities, which lie in the things. The works represent the extroversion. They form a bridge to the person as an observer. One sees what one sees. These are subjective points of view, which emphasize different meaning levels. A tension field between emotions and rationality, a fictional access to the reality. A metaphoric view at the world. The vestiges of the past accompanied by the dimensions of today Accompanying the life extremes and symbiosis.”*

The purpose of such writings is unclear to the reader. They mostly remain intriguing without revealing anything: some sort of advertising for the artist and his work. It almost seems like vagueness is intentional. Maybe it is dangerous to be specific, as it might reveal incompetence or might be found uninteresting?

Precision in writing, just as much as precision in making is a rare quality, and naturally, not every maker shall start sharpening pencils and make an analytical attempt. But it might be useful for artists to start adopting these skills. There is a great need of a theoretical platform, where makers would be able to write and analyze diverse phenomena concerning the field. Art Jewellery Forum<sup>17</sup> could be called the beginning of such development. It is an Internet-based platform, where members (gallerists, makers, students) are able to post their analytical articles. Practice of analyzing the work through writing shall become regular and common, taught in schools alongside with making work. Makers have to be able to define their position in relation to Art and Craft through their own practice, through their struggles and thoughts. Constant framework of the human body, questions of value and wearability are present in the making. Giving the job of critical analysis exclusively to Art historians might misplace or distort these notions.

Damien Skinner, a critic from New Zealand, trained as an art historian writes texts on variety of issues concerning the position of craft in general and jewellery in particular. He also takes interviews and writes exhibition reviews. I find his arguments and his writing style very sharp and powerful. One of his strongest articles discusses the lack of the critical discourse in the field of Contemporary Jewellery.<sup>18</sup> He argues that the critical discourse was founded on the principles of analyzing fine art, and therefore misplaced in context of craft.

Craft is not the same as fine art. It does not involve the same focus on concept or idea, but is concerned with a sophisticated understanding of materials, and a high level of skill. Craft is concerned with the hands, not the head, and it is driven by issues such as function, production, and has a much closer relationship to the marketplace. As a result, craft can’t sustain, or doesn’t deserve, the same kind of theorizing or critical discourse as fine art. To apply critical discourse to craft is to misunderstand what craft is. I disagree with the argument that “craft is concerned with the hands, not the head” when it comes to analysis of Contemporary Jewellery. If a concern of “function”, “production”, “skill” and material research is all Craft has to offer, then it is obviously not fitting for Contemporary Jewellery field. I would like to rephrase the last sentence and say: to apply critical discourses of Art or Craft to Contemporary Jewellery is to misunderstand what Contemporary Jewellery is.

Here comes back again my earlier concern with the outcome of art historians’ writings on Jewellery, as they keep bouncing of the issues of Art versus Craft, but for me, it is really missing the point.

Conceptually developed work exists in the field of Contemporary Jewellery and it deals with similar issues Art deals with, but in a framework of a human body, which always remains constant. Skinner’s article starts with the sentence “Why doesn’t contemporary jewelry have a tradition of critical discourse?” but then the whole argument is built from the point of view of Art versus Craft. I must question if this is really the issue. “The best contemporary jewelry can indeed play with the big boys (and girls) of the art world, and that it has something notable to say about both the body and vision.”<sup>19</sup> Contemporary Jewellery’s connection to Craft, is embedded in its interest in material investigation, development of techniques and their application; but it’s current state is much more complex and cannot be underestimated.

Sketching a rough mind map of conceptions mentioned in the thesis allowed me to understand and see how tools that belong to different disciplines intertwine withing the field of Contemporary Jewellery and how some of the conceptions, belonging exclusively to jewellery (wearability), shall be prasied as a strong standing point of the field. I also suggested that the variety of genres originates in schools and can be traced from there. The map is unfinished and ready for updates, so as the thesis itself, but it is great news, as it suggest we are witnessing a living, breathing, ever-changing discipline, that is now, and, indeed, contemporary.

CONCLUSION

When I started my search into the sources used in this thesis I was aiming to find clues that define Contemporary Jewellery today. Claiming territory for the field and not resorting to live up to the expectations of fashion or fine art.

In this thesis I found it important not only to reflect on position that I take in the field, neither to attribute it to others who inspired me, but to use them in order to shape definitions which surround the field of Contemporary Jewellery. Setting out to find a grid of conceptions that could be used by others to help shape the debate on future of Contemporary Jewellery. I have used my inspirers, people that represent three different generations in time (but also in my work and development), to orientate myself into the history of the field. Broadening my perspective and allowing the voice of makers to be discovered and analyzed. The possibility of

expressing their vision must be given to makers themselves, as they are the true “bearers of the word”<sup>20</sup> Also reflecting on all the other things that blur the notion of what may be the “core” of Jewellery. Contemporary Jewellery not only has to show its reflexivity, but also its resilience in the debate about its values, its discoveries, its characters and not to forget its heritage and tradition. We might not want to follow the road of deconstructive analysis that the arts have been concerned with for decades, neither do we want to fall back too much on technical precision and our instruments. Recognizing the importance as a maker to reflect on the tools we have to make work and carry a message. And to develop modes of production out of it’s every day application -the wearing of the work-, from which both makers and writers can derive a language to inspire others.

I have tried to engage people that have rebelled against (at that time) existing perimeters of the field, but whom, trough their practice found their proprietary place. These voices, even though conflicting at times, show their commitment to the implications of their field. They therefor become the voices that are willing to stride for its newfound discourse. They feel the need to find and stand behind what they might consider to be the “center” - the core on which the foundation can be built and developed. Those who understand these needs can help them to develop further. In that I recognize a strong tendency for new systems of communication, promotion and presentation to emerge. Artist who naturally contribute to this with their work and words, can make these vital steps , in order to strengthen the field in the future.

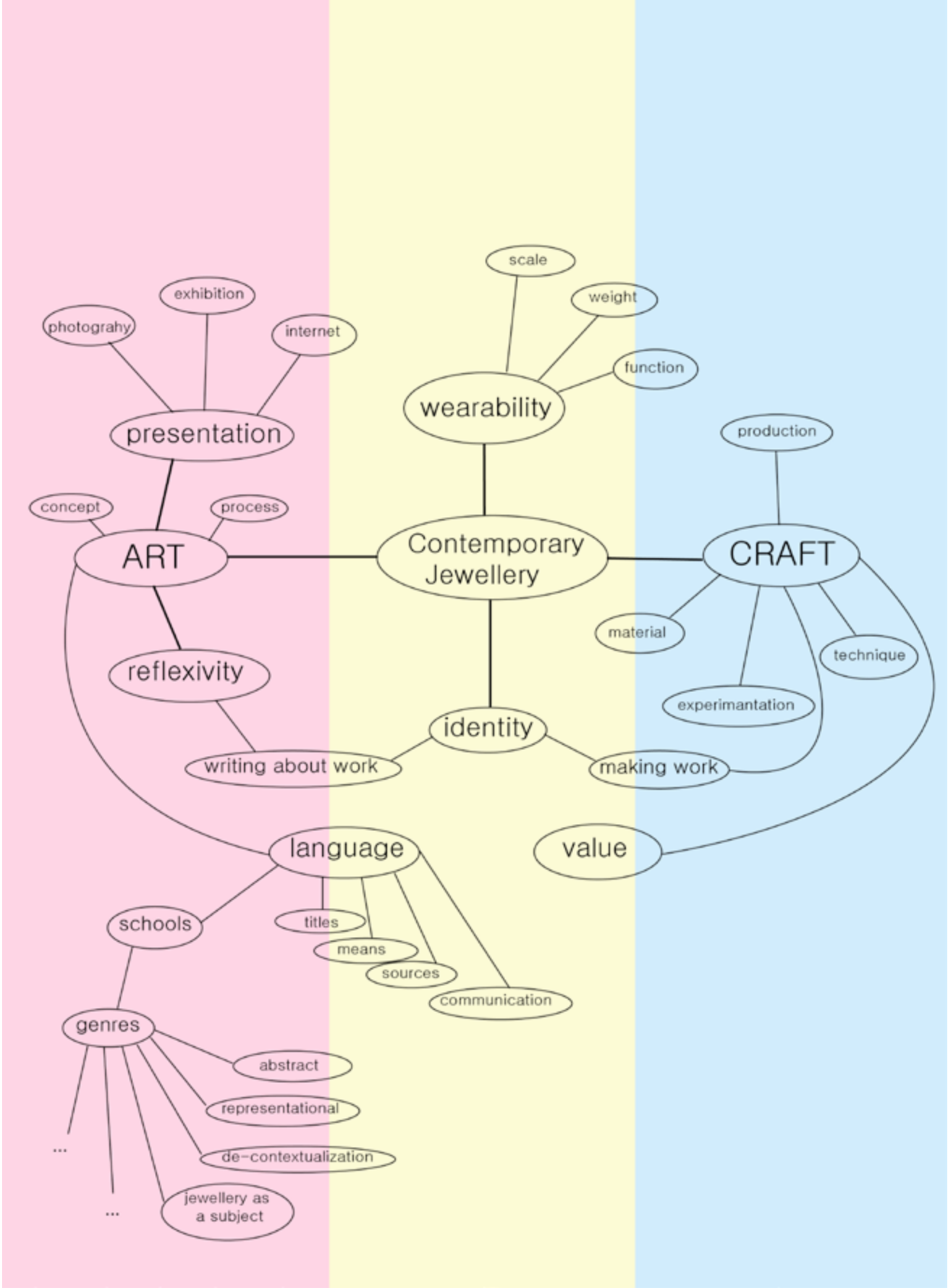


Image 23: Mind map of conceptions in the thesis

16 Web page address: <http://www.klimt02.net/> (Accessed on 21.04.2011)  
17 Web page address is <http://www.artjewelryforum.org/>  
18 Full text: <http://www.artjewelryforum.org/blog/2011/02/14/nothing-if-not-critical/> (21.04.2011)  
19 Article, from the Art Jewellery Forum, dedicated to the Gray Area Symposium, an event held in Mexico City in April 2010. This particular piece is paraphrasing Caroline Broadhead, 1950, UK. English jewellery and textile designer and course director of BA Jewellery at Central St Martins.,  
20 CH<sub>2</sub>=C(CH<sub>3</sub>)C(=O)OCH<sub>3</sub> enclosures and other TN’s .Ted Noten, Rotterdam, 010 Publishers, 2006



COLOFON

CONCEPT, TEXT, INTERVIEWS

Marina Elenskaya

ADVISE

Alena Alexandrova

INTERVIEWEES

Manfred Bischoff  
Ulrich Reithofer  
Volker Atrops

DESIGN

The Guardian  
Binnen Brouwersstraat 37-II  
1013 EE Amsterdam

FONT

Queens Park by Roger White

SPECIAL THANKS

Tatiana Elenskaya  
Christian van der Kaap

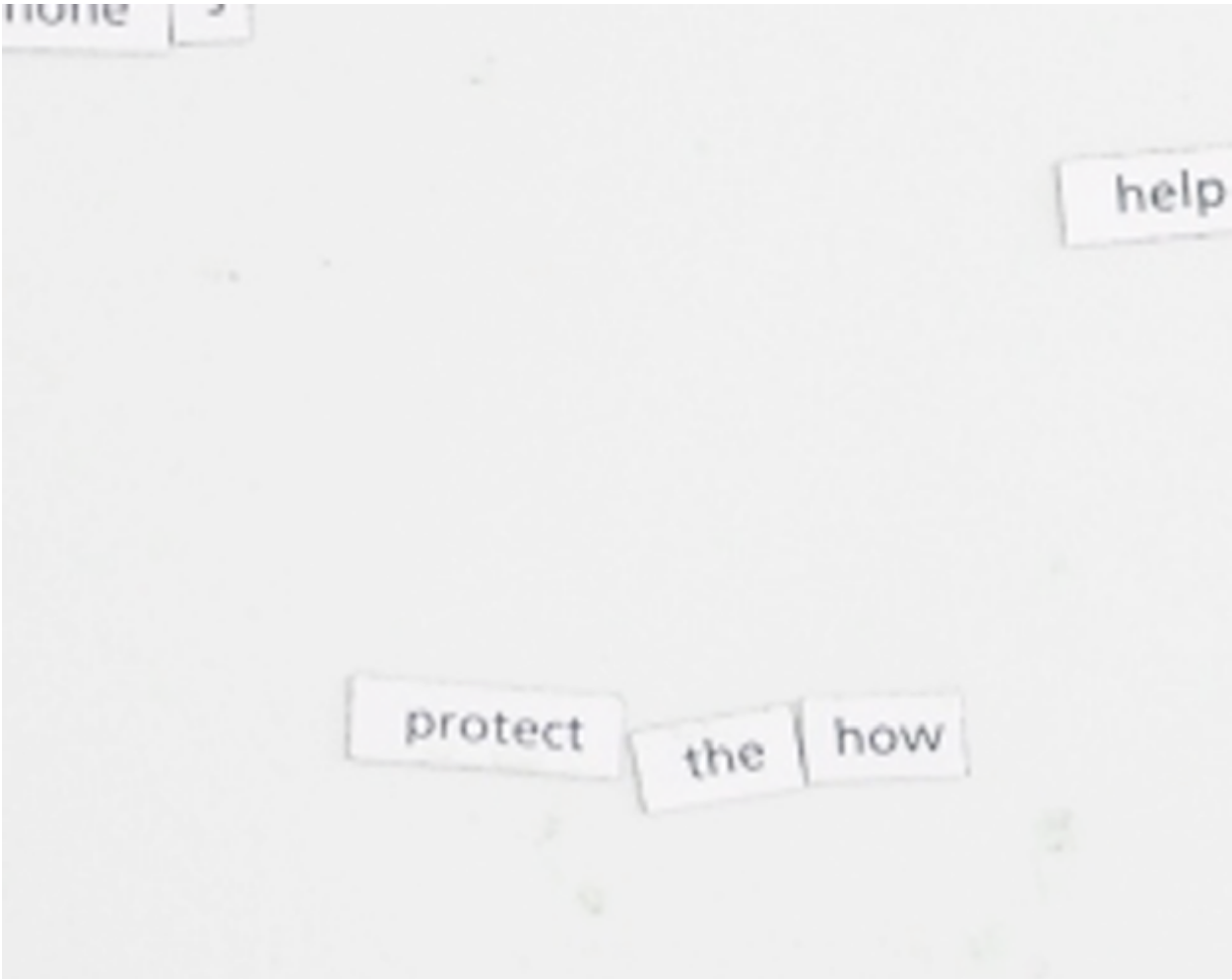


Image 24: Woodworkshop 2010,  
Gerrit Rietveld Academy

Marina Elenskaya, 1983 Completed a BA in Radio and Television Direction before graduating in 2009 from Alchimia Contemporary Jewellery School in Florence, Italy and finishing her second jewellery education at the Rietveld Acedemy in July 2011. Using her joint theoretical and professional skill and development she is currently working on setting up a platform for Contemporary Jewellery in Russia.

\* The title of the thesis is a quote from Manfred Bischoff’s interview.

\*\* The yellow tape which binds the pages of the thesis is used by Gerrit Rietveld Jewellery Department to mark tools that belong to them.