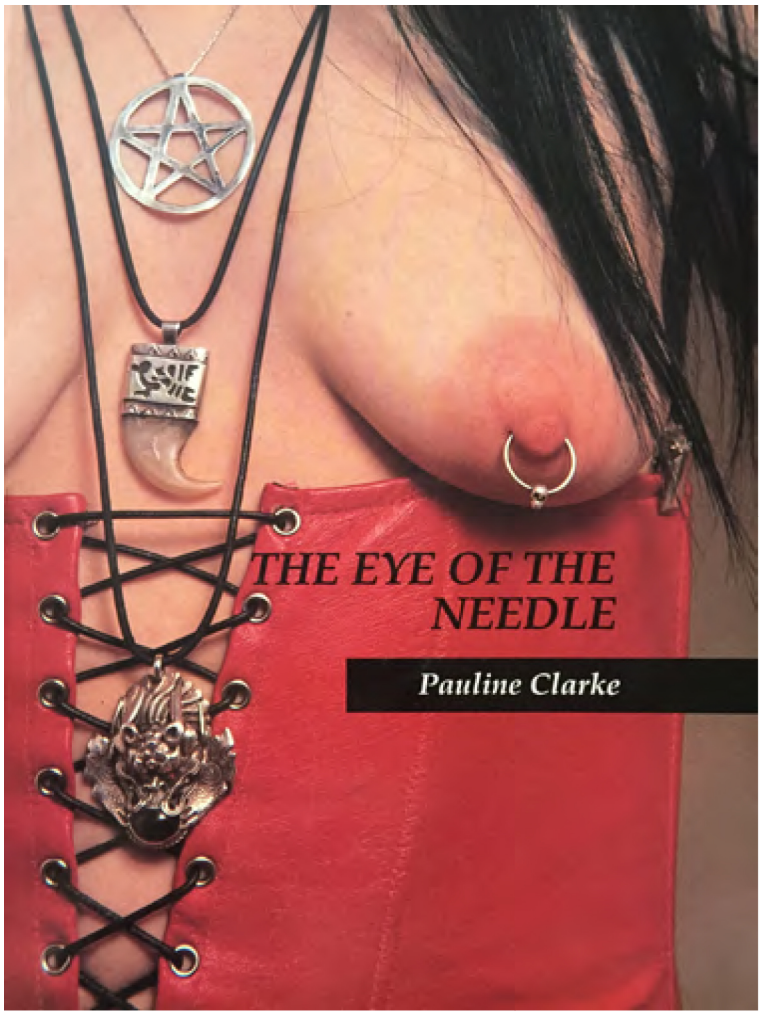
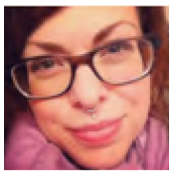


THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE
by Pauline Clarke

Second edition 1984
ISBN 0952117509
Published in 1992 by PAUK,
153 Tomkinson Rd, Nuneaton, Warwickshire, CV10 8DP England

A Book Review by Kendra Jane B
Body Piercing Archive



It is important to keep in mind the time frame this was published and how its purpose in a library or collection will have changed since its original publication. If this review had been written 20 years ago - when this book was one of the few available on body modification - it would have been an important and excellent educational tool for both the enthusiast as well as those considered professional piercers. Keep in mind that at this time there were very few piercing establishments that offered individuals who pierced as a profession.

Fast forward to now, when the educational body of literature for the body modification industry has grown significantly; this text now serves much better as a historical account as opposed to an educational reference. I also see it as a very important piece of the history of our industry, helping to bring piercing from the kink and fetish world (which you can tell influence this book quite heavily) to the more mainstream.

"Press about piercing at that time [the early '90s] was written by us for us: *PFIQ. Body Play. Body Art and Piercing World* out of the UK. For many of us—myself included—these publications opened our eyes to a completely new world. My aspirations to be as a piercer and body modification artist were directly shaped by what I read in these publications.

And now there is the internet. Piercers today are introduced to the world of piercing and body modification with a flood of information that was not readily available in years past. Sites like rec.arts.bodyart and BMEzine.com shaped body modification for the new generation. The problem in years past was too little information was available; now it's too much information to sort through" - James Weber The Point: Issue 41

It is interesting to note that the above comment by James Weber was 33 issues ago; it has been over eight years since that statement. Many of those websites are no longer what they were in readership or participation and others have simply been replaced all together. Our industry is experiencing unprecedented and exponential growth. This makes books such as Eye of the Needle so much more important to preserve and archive as they are the written history of our industry. This book is an indispensable addition to any collector's library.

As a historical text this book offers a look at what it was like for the body modification enthusiast in its infancy, not just in North America, but worldwide. It is a unique combination of instructional text containing brief descriptions of healing times and proper jewelry used to perform certain piercings, including septum, navel, and nipples. Male and female genital piercings are also discussed later in the book. These small written tutorials - complete with hand drawn diagrams by Alan Oversby (aka Mr. Sebastian)—are a key part to our history.

At the time this was written, few piercings in North America were done for fashion reasons; most body modification was rooted in sexuality or due to the love of physical adornment. The author mentions that at the time of publication, "Sleepers" were the most common, comfortable style of jewelry. She mentions repeatedly that the dominant styles of jewelry at the time were ball closure rings (BCR). This is what UK and English speaking Europeans have always referred to this style of jewelry as, continuing to this day. Whereas North American English speakers call this style of jewelry captive bead rings (or CBR). Most jewelry available was made from gold, silver, or surgical steel. This is also the time that men's ear piercings went from having very strong political ties to fashion statements. However nostril piercings were still rare and piercings like the septum were only seen at home or at private functions. Clarke explains that piercing went from the enthusiast to the public for fashion.

Clarke begins the list of piercings in this text with facial piercings, such as the lip and ear. Healing times are subjective and outdated, being quite a bit shorter than what we may suggest now. She sites the piercing gun as the most common method of performing an ear piercing. However, she does state that if you want to wear a ring immediately the piercing will need to be done with a hollow needle, but states that this method is slower and more painful. This is important, indicating that even decades ago people realized there were differences between piercings performed with piercing guns and hollow needles.

From here she moves on to talk about the navel piercing. Much of the information included for this piercing still holds true. Nipple piercings are the next to be covered and receive more attention than any other piercing at this point in the book. This, again, indicates a direct link between the roots of the piercing movement and the kink and fetishists of the time. This latter section for the book includes several excellent photos highlighting nipple piercings and their accompanying jewelry in both color and black and white. These collections of photos are an excellent window into the rise in popularity of piercing in the '80s and '90s. However the anatomy of a nipple piercing that is covered in this literature would now be considered outdated; as an industry standard, it is now agreed upon that it is not necessary to pierce into the areole no matter what the anatomy of the nipple.

From here, Clarke goes on to give answers to the most commonly asked questions about

body piercing, such as "does it hurt?" Trying to address the ideas of pain versus pleasure, and how one can become the other, again ties the roots of piercing to the S/M and kink cultures. She also offers other examples, stating that the simple act of adorning the body is able to affect the physiological aspect of a person's well being. She supplements these ideas with several first hand accounts or testimonials from people and why they have chosen to seek out body piercings and their motivations in becoming modified.

From what would have been modern accounts of body modification, Clarke goes further into what she feels are the different aspects of body piercing. She refers first to personal expression, such as dressing for pleasure, and then moves on to discuss the idea of collectors - those who had a true passion for piercing and modification. As with previous sections of the book, Clarke includes several pages of both color and black and white photographs as examples.

Moving onto the next section of the book, Clarke talks about the pioneers - those people we look to as the founders of the modern body piercing movement as a whole. From Doug Malloy to Alan Oversby, she offers their accounts and written dialogue and as well as her stories of their meetings and visits. She starts with a reprinting of the Adventures of Body Piercing by Doug Malloy. This is followed by a story by England's pioneer in the modification world, Mr. Sebastian. She rounds out this collection of history with letters and stories from Will and Ethel Granger.

The remainder of the book is largely dedicated to genital piercings accompanied with personal testimonials, great photographic examples, and more illustrations from Alan Oversby. These illustrations are much like the earlier examples, going over the technical aspects of these piercings (accurate and citing best practices for the time of publication). The focus on text and images related to genital piercings acts as another great indicator of the connection between sexuality and the roots of the piercing industry, not only in North America, but in other parts of the world as well.

To round out her book Clarke briefly touches on stretching, the tribal roots of our industry, and nipple training. She closes the book by offering her own account of her modification journey, including her thumb web piercings and her labia piercings done by Mr. Sebastian. As a historical piece of literature this personal account really gets demonstrates how far our industry has come in the past 40 years, from bedrooms and basements to board rooms and run ways. Although Clarke's book no longer serves as an educational reference, it would have when first published. It offers a colourful and intimate account of body piercing as it was in the beginning. It is the perfect example of how kinks, lovers, and BDSM practitioners helped to bring piercing from the closet to what has become common day practice.

One important thing to note is that the very last page of this publication is a set of standards that were set forth for UK piercers by PAUK (Piercing Association of the United Kingdom) and the Director of Public Health; this would have been one of the first sets of standards for the professional piercer, dictating what and how they may do parts of their job.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR PAULINE CLARKE

Clarke married in 1959. It was through her husband's interest in body piercing that led her to put compose this book. After having two kids and writing children's novels, her aspirations had always been to become a journalist.

It was after her first tattoo in 1965 that the door was really opened for what was to become her future and the focus of her journalistic career. By 1981 she had become much more involved in the tattoo community and in 1983 she was named Miss Tattoo, Great Britain. This led to many magazine features and interviews, and eventually to the creation of PAUK (Piercing Association of the United Kingdom). She then followed up with a quarterly publication called *Piercing World*.

OTHER TITLES BY THIS AUTHOR

• *Beyond the Eye of the Needle*
ISBN 0952117509
Published in 1992 by PAUK
153 Tomkinson Rd, Nuneaton,
Warwickshire, CV10 8DP England

This book serves as a sequel to Pauline Clarke's previous book, *The Eye of the Needle*. *Beyond The Eye of The Needle* leaps forward through a decade of events since those early days of body piercing, and contains many beautiful full page photographs of people showing their interest in body piercing while adorned with a variety of body jewelry. This publication presents multiple examples of piercing placement and stretched piercings, including facial, nipple, navel, and genital. It features the various groups of people that are all part of the fraternity of "Body Piercing Enthusiasts," portraying its significance as a part of life.

• *Spheres of Adornment*
Publisher Piercing World, 1996
ISBN 095281790X, 9780952817901
Published in 1992 by PAUK,
153 Tomkinson Rd, Nuneaton,
Warwickshire, CV10 8DP England

Spheres Of Adornment incorporates body piercing, tattoo, and fetish dress, while exploring the fascinating realm of body decoration. This book displays full page photos of decorated people of alternative facets: showing body jewellery, tattoo styles, provocative PVC and leather wear.

• *Piercing World*
Published by PAUK
153, Tomkinson Rd, Nuneaton,
Warwickshire, CV10 8DP England

Quarterly, full-colour publication. Annual Subscription: pounds 16 UK, pounds 20 Europe, pounds 25 overseas. Subscription to *Piercing World* grants automatic membership to PAUK. The publication features detailed color and black and white photos of piercings and tattoos, unusual jewelry designs, multiple piercings, and piercing techniques including all genital piercings.
http://www.vanishingtattoo.com/pauline_clarke.htm

SIDE NOTE ON ALAN OVERSBY

Alan Oversby (20 February 1933 – 8 May 1996) was one of the primary figures in the development of contemporary body piercing in Europe. He was better known by his professional name Mr. Sebastian.

Originally an art teacher, Alan Oversby left his initial profession to pursue his interests in tattooing and piercing instead. From his studio in London, he promoted both tattooing and body piercing, especially within the gay leather community. His correspondence with both Doug Malloy and Jim Ward si well documented and even being sponsored by Malloy, he visited Los Angeles. Malloy was also responsible for trip to London that included companions Jim Ward and Sailor Sid Dillor. These visits and written correspondences between all of these parties were critical to the global spread of the techniques and technology used in contemporary body piercing. SOME OF THIS CORRESPONDENCE CAN BE SEEN AT THE BPA EXHIBIT IN VEGAS THIS JULY.

Oversby's connection and involvement in body modifications goes far beyond just these letters and visits mentioned above. However, as this article does not focus on him as a topic we will keep the description of him brief.

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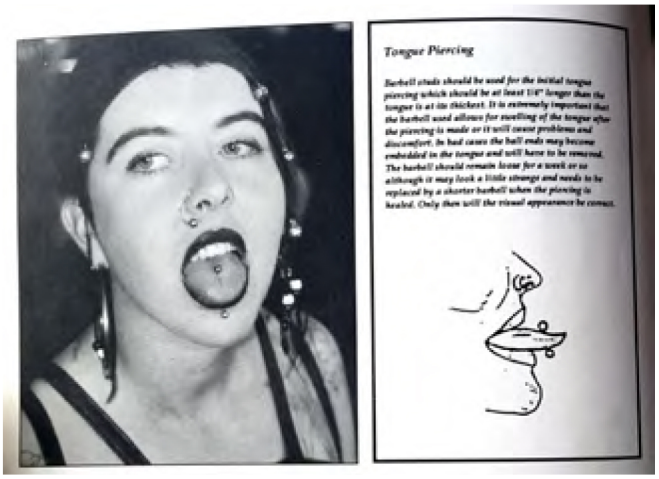
Editor's Note: In this review I state that Doug Malloy's book was called *Adventures of Body Piercing*. The original title was *The Art of Pierced Penises and Decorative Tattoos* and was republished by Gauntlet as *The Adventures of a Piercing Freak*.