

DISSERTATION

Exact Fantasies: Practice-led research into the materialisation of fetish power in contemporary art.

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Jason Kochel hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is comprised of two parts: a Studio Research component with an accompanying Exegesis (66%), and a Dissertation (33%). The Dissertation presents the theoretical component of the research topic—Exact Fantasies: Practice-led research into the materialisation of fetish power in contemporary art.

The term fetish conjures sensuous objects of fixation and perversion. The dissertation argues that the negative perceptions of the fetish derive from its history as an Occidental construction and allude to the colonial, racial and sexual tropes of its heritage. Focusing on the discourses of material culture, anthropology and art history, the fetish is reconsidered as a rejection of the aesthetics of the Sublime, incorporating perceived abject states located in the non-Western Other. The magical principles relating to the fetish incorporate these abject states through body metaphors and mimetic principles of sympathetic magic. Fetish power in art operates through the exploitation of these body metaphors, reifying non-sensuous conceptions of the world through the untranscended materiality of the art object.

The studio research and exegesis present sculptural work examining the embodied relationship of the fetish to the body, through material metaphors of containment, boundaries and fluidity. Contemporary fetish discourse and fieldwork at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford and Musée du quai Branly, Paris, provide a theoretical and material framework from which to reconsider the fetish artefact. The sculptural work incorporates perceptions of purity and contagion through principles of sympathetic magic to explore personified qualities of the inanimate whilst avoiding figurative representation. The work is presented as a series of installation tableaux alluding to phantasmagoria and a Freudian sense of the uncanny, a sense of the familiar made foreign. This sense of misrecognition acknowledges the power of mimetic transformation that occurs through sympathetic magic, giving bodily power to objects that bear no resemblance to the bodies they reference.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation addresses the theoretical concerns of the topic, *Exact Fantasies*: practice-led research into the materialisation of magical fetish power in contemporary art. The dissertation provides a theoretical context that informs studio based research by relating current fetish discourse to theories of embodiment and constructions of meaning derived from the body. These theoretical concerns support and reinforce the importance of modes of practice that engage with affective and sensuous aesthetics. The arguments I have made here support intuitive responses about how objects, in particular fetish objects, operate primarily through embodied relationships to the body. The exegesis addresses the practice-led research which is underpinned by the theoretical concerns raised here.

The term fetish operates as a provocation to traditional conceptions of the role of objects—exerting disproportionate value upon those that succumb to a perception of its power. The term presents difficult intellectual terrain, its usage often encompassing competing points of view. The concept of what a fetish might be seems to vary wildly depending upon the perspective of those telling its story. The history of the term and its association with primitive magic, desirous perversion and the political economy of commodities renders a discourse of fetishism seemingly difficult to reconcile.

There has been a reappraisal of fetish discourse within the social sciences, especially within anthropology under the work of William Pietz (1985, 1987, 1988, 2003)¹ who produced a series of essays outlining *The Problem of the Fetish*, and from which much debate and theory has developed (Apter & Pietz 1993, Shelton 1995, Spyer 1998).² The problem of the fetish, as Pietz argues, is the diverse application of the term throughout history. Historically defined as irrational, or at worst profane and perverse, the fetish appears to operate as a form of immaterial presence reified within an object that engenders a sense of power over its adherents. Treating the self as necessarily embodied, fetish objects come to manifest desires and beliefs in tangible form. The key points of embodiment and reification, as they relate to Pietz's conception of the fetish, are themes that I will pursue. The conjunction of embodiment and reification result in the fetish object expressing a form of "untranscended materiality" (Pietz 1985), where a 'thing' becomes a conflation of signifier with signified, subject with object—the fetish then operates as manifestly liminal in nature. Pietz's model of the fetish complicates representational theories of meaning, but also challenges a dualistic separation of subjects from objects.

Despite its near abandonment as an academic concept within anthropology due to the perception of its apparent lack of coherence, fetishism has enjoyed a discursive resurgence since the 1980s

1. William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, part I," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9, no. 1 (1985); ———, "The Problem of the Fetish, part II," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 13, no. Spring (1987); ———, "The Problem of the Fetish, part III," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 16, no. Autumn (1988); ———, "Fetishism and Materialism: The limits of Theory in Marx," in *Fetishism as cultural discourse*, ed. Emily; Pietz Apter, William (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); ———, "Fetish," in *Critical terms for art history*, ed. R.S. Nelson and R. Shiff (University of Chicago Press, 2003).

2. Emily Apter and William Pietz, eds., *Fetishism as cultural discourse* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); Anthony Shelton, ed. *Fetishism: visualising power and desire* (London: Brighton: South Bank Centre; Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums in association with Lund Humphries, 1995); Patricia Spyer, ed. *Border fetishisms: material objects in unstable spaces* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

with the work of Michael Taussig (1980) and William Pietz (1985, 1987, 1988, 1993, 2003). What arises from the work of these two authors is an acknowledgment that the fetish exemplifies an attitude towards the material world—previously characterised by Victorian taxonomies by terms such as ‘magical’, ‘irrational’, and ‘primitive’—that is profoundly born from an Occidental (Western European) ontology, developed since the seventeenth-century by Enlightenment thinkers such as Immanuel Kant (1776) and G.F.W. Hegel (1861).³ In this context the origins of the fetish—charms and idols traded from the Guinea coast of West Africa—came to inherit an imposition of European aesthetic judgment, contributing to a vernacular perception approximating abjection. The colonial discourse that has led to the construction of this perception still carries resonances today in racial, sexual and primitive tropes alluding to the concept of fetishism as a negative. In this respect, while the theoretical discourse of fetishism within anthropology reflects the subject as exemplary of social and personal creativity (eg Graeber 2005, Pels 2010), the term’s perception within the vernacular of mass culture has an aesthetic that is more informed by its historical associations. The term fetish is, as Pietz (1985) asserts, a ‘factitious universal’, a term defined by the historical moment of its incidence. The history of the term is indeed coloured and today, the vernacular of the term *fetish* places it with associations of sexual perversion and the erotics of subcultures (Shelton 1995; Steele 1996) but in particular a subjective identity expressed through the commodity fixation of fashion and clothing (Steele 1996; Goodlad & Bibby 2007).⁴ The interplay of the body, identity and the fetish raise significant questions about how we think through the things around us.

Through an anthropology of the fetish I will explore the relationship between Pietz’s discourse of the fetish and Western contemporary art. Pietz (2003) suggests the relationship of the ‘true fetish’ to its aesthetic and personal significance implicates a reappraisal by art historians, aesthetic theorists and artists alike:

For art historians, it suggests the possibility that the fascination exerted by African fetishes over early modernist artists had less to do with their visual form relative to such movements as expressionism and cubism than with their historical substance as accursed objects transfixing the spiritual violence of the colonial savagery that brought them to Europe. For aesthetic theorists, it challenges the traditional exclusion of personal interest, social power and material passion from our conception of the experience of art. For artists, it suggests that their productions may more accurately be regarded as power objects...’’⁵

Defining the work of artists as ‘power objects’ emphasises the importance of the agency of things and their ability to influence the lives of people. The tendency to view objects as animate or personified, infers a perception of their having a bodily corporeality. In the case of Pietz’s

3. Immanuel Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*. (*Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime*) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960 [1776]); G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the philosophy of history*, trans. J. Sibree (Henry G. Bonn, 1861), 98-99.

4. Anthony Shelton, “The Chameleon Body: Power, Mutilation and Sexuality,” in *Fetishism : visualising power and desire* ed. Anthony Shelton (London : Brighton : South Bank Centre ; Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, 1995); Valerie Steele, *Fetish : fashion, sex and power* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1996); Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby, eds., *Goth : undead subculture* (New York : Zone Books, 2007).

5. Pietz, “Fetish,” 313.

characterisation, fetishes act as ‘external organs’.⁶ (Figure 1) Further implicated by the corporeal qualities of fetish objects, is the question of how such a perceptual and cognitive leap occurs, how are material objects imbued with an animate presence? This might be easily understood where a fetish object directly mimics an anthropomorphic form. But what of the cases where that similarity is theoretical or abstract, what Mauss and Hubert (1902) refer to as the ‘poorly executed ideogram’, cases where the verisimilitude of the fetish object bears no resemblance to the body whatsoever?⁷ This leads to further questions regarding how best to understand the relationship between embodiment and meaning, and in the case of the fetish, what does it mean to be considered an organ of the body? Along with questions of embodiment, Pietz’s fetish relates to a perception of a reified presence, where a concept is treated as a thing, the idea of something becoming tangible and corporeal. What does it mean to ‘love’ a shoe, or ‘worship’ a rice wafer? The incorporation of ‘god’, ‘spirit’, ‘energy’, or ‘mana’ into a physical and sensate material thing implies an inadequacy of Saussurian models of linguistic analysis, where the object performs as a referent of some other form of meaning. In the case of Pietz’s fetish, there is no separation of meaning from its manifestation. The fetish collapse of sensuous (material) and non-sensuous (conceptual) realms challenges traditional Cartesian dualities of mind/body, spirit/matter. This in turn raises questions regarding how best to understand our physical, sensate and emotional responses to fetish objects, in the wake of broader philosophical problems regarding subjective material realities and how best to understand concepts of the immaterial expressed in material form.



Figure 1. Cheyenne, Montana, North America
Afterbirth of a child, wrapped in animal skin decorated with beadwork, c.1880
 bead, human body part, animal skin
 158 mm (length)
 Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford [1930.25.1]

The neighbouring tribe of the Lakota believe that after the birth, maternal grandmothers present “matching charms in the form of beaded pouches representing lizards. Believed to endow health and long life, the lizard charm was the first embodiment of a fundamental Lakota life: *sicun*, a power granted to all animate and inanimate things at birth. A baby had only a small amount, but it was believed that placing the umbilical cord in the pouch would transmit something of the lizard’s protective power to the baby.. The matching empty pouch was hidden far away to decoy bad spirits from the baby’s source of power.”

from Bray, K.M. *Crazy Horse: A Lakota Life*: Univ of Oklahoma Pr, 2008:6.

6. ———, “The Problem of the Fetish, part II,” 44.

7. Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1972 [1902]), 68.

The methodology adopted in this dissertation begins with an historical contextualisation of the fetish to establish some of the aesthetic tropes developed in the Euro-American understanding of the term. Pietz (2003) suggests that Benjamin's 'dialectics of seeing' offers a methodology that addresses the critical concerns of the interplay between history, materiality and subjectivity to best understand the meaning of fetish objects.⁸ As Susan Buck-Morss (1989) explains, Benjamin's dialectics "took seriously the debris of mass culture as the source of philosophical truth."⁹ This debris forms an integral part of how historical moments of aesthetic prejudice are defined. I take Benjamin's concept of seeing as a metaphor for a means to illuminate the world, his dialectics establishing a way for knowledge to develop through an interface between the exactness of materiality and the fantasy of interpretation.¹⁰ For Benjamin (1939), the power or 'aura' of an artwork relates to his ideas on originality, in a question of the quality of a copy in the mind's eye.¹¹ What develops from this dissertation are ongoing questions regarding acts of mimesis and translation, and how the body interfaces with the material world.

In Chapter 1, I address the 'debris of mass culture' and the way it has informed a vernacular of the fetish, both in intellectual discourse and a populist understanding of the term. The historical fascination with African fetishes by the European artists of the nineteenth-century exemplifies an aestheticising of fetish tropes relating to primitivism and abjection. African fetishes were delineated from the category of art, instead considered evidence of the 'primitive other' and classified within a "Eurocentric voyeurism of 'other collecting'".¹² The fetish then represents a challenge to the traditional canon of aesthetic appreciation—as it is defined by Hegel and Kant—as being uniquely 'unenlightened' and 'sensuous'. The original perceptions of the African fetishes returning to Europe acted as objects upon which much of the violence and savagery of colonial expansion became mapped. The theoretical discourses of Freud's psycho-analysis and Marx's social theory developed their own concepts of the fetish based upon the European interface with Congolese Africa. From this historical position the way in which a theory of fetishism developed becomes more apparent and the threads that Pietz develops into his own conditions of fetishism are based upon these historical precedents.

8. "Benjamin developed a materialist method that approached cultural artifacts, be they works of art or common things encountered on the street, as "dialectical images" whose power to place people's everyday lives within an unwaveringly mythicized present the critic must engage by combining research into the historical singularity of these objects with a subjective yielding to the dreamlike fantasies ossified within even ordinary things." Pietz, "Fetish," 312.

9. Susan Buck-Morss, *The dialectics of seeing* Walter Benjamin and the Arcades project (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), ix. Buck-Morss constructs Benjamin's unfinished *Passagen Werk* (Arcades Project) into a hypothetical form, treating his extensive collection of notes (debris) on the nineteenth-century industrial culture of Paris. While the connection between the hegemony of vision and modernisation is not explicit in Benjamin's work, the ocularcentric nature of industrial capitalism seems to be one possible and persuasive conclusion—the enchantment and re-enchantment of its own commoditised fetishes. (D.M. Levin, "Introduction," in *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, ed. D.M. Levin (University of California Press, 1993), 22-23.)

10. The concept of 'exact fantasy' developed in dialogue with Theodor Adorno as part of a philosophy of *Negative Dialectics*, that related to Adorno and Benjamin's philosophical project to critic the 'culture industry', reassert the importance of the subject and give primacy to the object over language. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* ((Frankfurt a.M.): Suhrkamp, 1966). See also Keya Ganguly, "Adorno, authenticity, critique," in *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*, ed. C. Bartolovich and N. Lazarus (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 250-51; Susan Buck-Morss, *The origin of negative dialectics*, Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute (Hassocks, Eng.: Harvester Press, 1977), 85-88.

11. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility [Third Version]," in *The art of art history: a critical anthology*, ed. D. Preziosi (Oxford University Press, 2009 [1939]).

12. Emily Apter, "Introduction," in *Fetishism as cultural discourse*, ed. Emily Apter and William Pietz (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 3.

In Chapter 2, I look at how meaning is established through the body. I look at Bourdieu's principle of practice theory and bodily *habitus* as a means to understand how knowledge of the world can rest within the tuned responses of our bodies. The location of bodily knowledge through an interaction with the material world complicates simple separations of concept, object and body. Recent work by Mark Johnson (2007) regarding the relationship between meaning, aesthetics and the body, offers an argument to understand their relationship. For Johnson, meaning through the body does not equate to truth conditions established linguistically, but there is a necessary correlation between meaning established bodily and linguistic meaning that is then extrapolated from that meaning.¹³ For Johnson the 'mind' is thoroughly 'embodied' and therefore acts in continuity with knowledge gained through our senses.¹⁴ Johnson's theory offers a means to understand how we then 'animate' objects, by mapping 'body metaphors' onto them, creating an extension of our body image. Within anthropology, traditional concepts of animism and magic relate to concepts of contagion and pollution (Tylor 1871, Frazer 1925).¹⁵ These ideas are revisited, starting with the work of Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* (1969), looking at how the body acts as a matrix through which concepts of order and disorder are manifested.¹⁶ Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (1982), developed Douglas' ideas into a concept of abjection.¹⁷ Kristeva's concept of abjection, whilst psychoanalytic in nature, offers some relationships to the Euro-American vernacular of the fetish in mass culture. Abjection as defined by Kristeva, intersects with concepts of liminality, but also themes of incorporation and rejection, themes that resonate with the aesthetic of the fetish within the debris of Euro-American mass culture. Douglas and Kristeva establish links between the psychic quality of materials with powerful concepts of the sacred and profane. The connections between the material qualities of abjection and the body help to establish an understanding of the fetish as an organ of the body.

In Chapter 3, I consider the place of the fetish within contemporary art. I draw together the discursive and historical framework with how meaning is generated through the relationships with the body, to understand what aspects of Pietz's fetish apply to considerations of Western contemporary art. I follow Morphy's (2010) assertion that there are two key questions regarding the cross-cultural consideration of art: What is the context of its meaning? How does it effect the viewer and what is its aesthetic effect?¹⁸ Firstly I address the historical consumption of the African

13. Mark Johnson, *The meaning of the body*, aesthetics of human understanding (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2007), 211.

14. Ibid., 274-75. Johnson (2007) argues that cognition is essentially embodied, challenging traditional Cartesian views of the separation of the mind and body as a dualist structure. Johnson instead offers a non-dualistic ontology based upon the principle of continuity between sensate bodily experience and abstract metaphorical thinking. (145) This has profound implications for a modern consideration of aesthetics based upon Kant's model of a detached subject. As Johnson states: "Kant's influential idea that the experience of beauty requires a form of 'disinterested' judgment that suspends one's practical, ethical, and political engagement persists even today in the guise of the conditions for genuine aesthetic contemplation of art." (211) See also the work of Elizabeth Grosz regarding the corporeal mind. E. A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, : toward a corporeal feminism (St. Leonards, N.S.W. : Allen & Unwin, 1994).

15. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* [abridged ed.], abridged ed., new impression ed., vol. 1 (London: Macmillan & Co, 1960 [1925]); Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive culture*, 2 vols., researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art and custom. (London: 6th ed., J.Murray, 1871 [1920]).

16. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 2nd impression with corrections ed., An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).

17. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, An essay on abjection (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

18. Howard Morphy, "Art as Action, Art as Evidence," in *The Oxford handbook of material culture studies*, ed. Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2010), 280.

fetish by Euro-American artists at the turn of the twentieth-century. Through perceived qualities of a primitive aesthetic ‘truth’ akin to ‘natural’ states of being, artists largely within the Surrealist movement incorporated images of female sexuality and male fantasy into their work. Within the Surrealists however, the work of Georges Bataille (1927-1939) and Michel Leiris (1929, 1930) establish significant connections with phenomenological materialism.¹⁹ Bataille developed his own concept of the abject which pre-dates Kristeva’s theories on the subject; however it seems not to have been as widely referenced or as influential. Along with his concepts of the *informe* and ‘base materialism’, Bataille argued for a sensate immediacy between art and its ‘viewer’, something truly affective, what Leiris deemed to be a ‘True Fetish’ response.²⁰ The relationship of the ‘True Fetish’ to the body of those that adhere to its power requires an aesthetic response that is necessarily embodied and engaged, rather than detached and contemplative. This shift in the register of aesthetic sensibility, away from an ocularcentric position towards a more complete incorporation of the sensorium, requires a reconsideration of representational models of meaning—where the act of seeing is often conflated with that of representation. In this regard, the importance of reification within Pietz’s model of the fetish raises questions regarding the nature of the meaning that becomes reified. If we consider a ‘concept’ as something that is traditionally only accessible through an act of conscious thought then an aesthetic model of detached contemplation reasserts the importance of a representational model of sign and signifier. On the other hand, if as Johnson (2007) argues, that meaning operates in continuity between body and mind, there is great meaning attached to the corporeal experiences and knowledge that our bodies contain. Therein lies a question as to the validity of a sensuous reification, of the importance of realising the immaterial through the material, making manifest meaning that cannot be expressed linguistically. Methodologically, this shifts the premise for understanding things and our relationship to them. Henare et al (2007) argue that methodology of thing-as-heuristic should operate to reveal differing ontologies of cultural groups but I would argue in the case of art and the fetish, subjective ontologies as well.²¹ In regard to the fetish, and the art object, moments of devotion are profoundly personal and subjective. This interaction of the subjective and the material world is something that Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin struggled with. Their concept of ‘exact fantasy’ operates as a point of theoretical departure and methodological speculation as to how best to understand the fetishist’s absorption of a material thing into their own body image. Through the act of interpretation, a material thing becomes memorialised, a material testament to a subjective fantasy.

This dissertation explores contemporary understandings of the concept of fetishism, within anthropological and material culture discourse, but also the historical influences upon the vernacular understanding of the term, as it is depicted and understood in Western popular culture. These two methods of inquiry reveal two perspectives of perceiving and interpreting the same object of study. This split process of analysis reflects the difficulty in addressing the artist as academic and practitioner simultaneously—as ethnographer and cultural creator. This dialectic

19. G. Bataille, *Visions of excess: selected writings 1927-1939*, trans. A. Stoekl (Manchester University Press, 1985); Michel Leiris, “Alberto Giacometti,” *Documents* 1, no. 4 (1929); ———, “L’homme at son interieur,” *Documents* 5(1930).

20. ———, “Alberto Giacometti,” 209.

21. Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell, eds., *Thinking through things : theorising artefacts in ethnographic perspective* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York : Routledge, 2007).

method attempts to portray the double perspective inherent within the concept of the fetish object, from the point of view of the cultural theorist, gazing at the fetishist, and the fetishist gazing at the fetish.

CHAPTER 1: FETISH

In this Chapter I begin by establishing an archaeology of the term ‘fetish’ to set up two separate but interrelated themes of inquiry. Firstly, an historical perspective provides an understanding of the development of the vernacular usage of the term fetish from European origins. This will show key tropes in the modern Euro-American perspective of the fetish and help to understand the aesthetic and art historical relevance of the term. An historical perspective will establish the divergent theoretical adoptions of fetishism within psychoanalysis, anthropology and Marxist theory. The history of the fetish is addressed by genre rather than in a linear chronology, thus attempting to outline the development of key theoretical points that create a coherent discourse, but also attributing a genealogy that establishes the vernacular tropes within contemporary Western culture. Secondly, within the Chapter I address current attempts to establish a coherent fetish discourse within anthropology and material culture studies—largely following the work of William Pietz (1985, 1987, 1988) regarding *The Problem of the Fetish*. The problem of the fetish, as Pietz regards it, is that the usage and application of the term throughout history is seemingly disparate and without the possibility of coherent discourse. The history of the term establishes the foundations for understanding Pietz’s framework and the key theoretical issues in establishing a discourse on the subject.

1.1 Historical Beginnings

Tracing the journey or archaeology of the fetish concept is integral to understanding that the application of the term, and indeed its manifestation, is peculiar to the historical moments surrounding it. A discussion of the historical usage of the term fetish will reveal the thread it retains to the body both in its conception and usage. Pietz (1987) argues that the fetish:

has never enjoyed the social actuality of being an institutionally defined object within a particular culture or social order... From this standpoint, the fetish must be viewed as proper to no historical field other than that of the history of the word itself, and to no discrete society or culture, but to a cross-cultural situation formed by the ongoing encounter of the value codes of radically different social orders... The exception is the sexual fetish of the twentieth-century medical-psychiatric discourse.¹

Today, the common perception of what a fetish is perhaps relies more strongly on its associations with Freud’s (1921) development of the concept as a perversion—a material object that is fixated upon as a substitute for the fetishist’s (usually male) mother’s missing penis—than it does to its historical antecedents in European witch burning and social Darwinism.² However the sexualisation and ‘dark’ nature of the fetish’s character can be shown to derive heavily from a history of European thought beginning with Enlightenment thinkers such as Edmund Burke (1729–1797),

1. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part II,” 10.

2. Sigmund Freud, ed. *On sexuality : three essays on the theory of sexuality, and other works* (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1977 (1921)).

G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) regarding aesthetics, religion and sexuality. The reinforcement of these Occidental taxonomies in the construction of the non-European Other, particularly through engagements with Africa, led to ongoing development of the fetish idea.³ The importance of this history will help us understand the sources of power attributed to the fetish and how this lineage shapes today's perception of the fetish object, and also explains the continuities throughout its discourse, which will be the foundation for exploring the relationship between the fetish, the body and art.

The term fetish is more profoundly a product of European construction and prejudice towards witchcraft and sorcery than it is a reality in the colonised lands of the Other. McGaffey (1993) remarks, "let us remember that 'fetish' is an entirely European term, a measure of persistent European failure to understand Africa."⁴ The term *fetish* has come to evolve, its use being mapped onto phenomena that may not, in the first instance, fit the term—a mistranslation. In the case of the interfaces between Europeans and Africans over a period of 500 years of trade, colonisation and religious expansion, the evolution of the term *fetish* reflected the power relations between the two civilisations, becoming an exemplar for ideas of primitivism, exotic eroticism and pagan witchcraft.

Falsehood and Witchcraft

The term fetish initially referred to something made or artificial and laid a foundation for its ongoing conception as a negative, a profane object. Edward Tylor (1871) shows that the etymology of the term *fetish* derives from the Latin, *factitious* or *factitius*, meaning to make or fabricate (from *facere*), or in this case more appropriately, magically artful.⁵ This terminology came to be incorporated by Christian theology to encompass related ideas of witchcraft and idolatry, being exemplars of falsity. The relationship with the artificial and the authentic became enmeshed into the idea of the fetish from the beginning and the relationship to artifice and devilish power would create a foundation within European thinking that carried on through centuries.

For the Christian church, any object used in the observance of practices involving superstition and witchcraft was seen to have illegitimate sacramental power, a form of idolatry. Pietz (1985) examines the term *Fetisso*, as used by the Portuguese and Spanish during the middle ages, that came to denote a unique application of Christian attitudes relating to witchcraft and superstition, namely, *vain observances*⁶ and *veneficia*.⁷ It was only through the doctrine of the Christian Church that

3. See Foucault's archaeology of sexuality: Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité (The History of sexuality)* (New York : Pantheon Books, 1987).

4. Wyatt MacGaffey et al., *Astonishment and power* (Washington : Published for the National Museum of African Art by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 32.

5. Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive culture*, 2 vols., vol. 2, researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art and custom. (London: 6th ed., J.Murray, 1871 [1920]), 143.

6. *Vain observances* 'were conceived as physical actions that sought means whereby humans could interfere with processes and laws of nature.' Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, part II," 30.

7. The Theodosian Code of 438 AD was a collection of all the laws of the Roman Empire from Constantine I to Theodosius II. The Code included definitive laws against witchcraft and superstitious magical practices, including veneficium, which "refers to the art of poisoning and more generally to sorcery exemplified by the use of herbs and magically powerful physical substances in the making of potions and philtres to achieve some specific effect on another person (death, love). Ibid., 32.

objects could become legitimately sacramental. This attitude towards the manufactured object and the nature of a true votive act established the boundary between what was right and pious, and what was superstitious and magical – essentially anything that was seen as magical implied demonic invocation.⁸ This was the worldview that pervaded the mindset of Europeans travelling outside of Europe and it was this interpretive gaze that coloured their view of non-European religious practices found in Africa, Oceania and the Americas. The construction of the African fetish was an Occidental one based largely on medieval Christian fears of witchcraft and the supernatural and taxonomies of the sacred and profane.

The Christian moral philosophies that European traders and missionaries incorporated into their relations with non-European cultures established the seeds of the idea of African fetishism. During the mid 15th Century, the Portuguese created a presence along the African coast from Angola to Senegal. A growing body of travelogues from the European traders remarked on the seeming confusion of the African mind between religious and non-religious concerns. The terminology *fetish* became adopted and used by the Africans from their dealings with the Spanish and Portuguese who were incorporated into *fetish* pacts through trade agreements. These pacts involved a process of ritualised oath swearing that often involved acts of verbal invocation and chanting, swearing on a *fetish* object, or imbibing magical substances.⁹ This involvement of the body and the fetish reflects the binding of the fetish to the body to instantiate its power. The Africans began use of the term *fetish* to describe both the ritualised actions that invoked power, and the objects that were used as conduits for that power. The Europeans understood the term *fetish* to refer to witchcraft and superstition, which led them to believe that the African mind was largely untamed by an organised religious structure.¹⁰ This cultural confusion or mistranslation carried back to European constructions of Africa as largely un-Godly and primitive, being devoted to witchcraft as the governing principle of their spiritual beliefs. As William Smith notes in his 1744 account, *A New Voyage to Guinea*:

The most numerous sect are the Pagans, who trouble themselves about no Religion at all; yet every one of them have some Trifle or other, to which they pay a particular Respect, or Kind of Adoration, believing it can defend them from all Danger's: Some have a Lion's Tail, some a Bird's Feather, some a Pebble, a Bit of Rag, a Dog's Leg; or, in short, any Thing they fancy: And this they call their FITTISH, which Word not only signifies the Thing worshipped, but sometimes a Spell, Charm, or Inchantment. To take FITTISH, is, to take an Oath; which Ceremony is variously perform'd in several Parts of Guinea.¹¹

8. Ibid., 30.

9. Ibid., 43-44.

10. ———, “The Problem of the Fetish, part III,” 111-12.

11. W. Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea* (Taylor and Francis, 1967), 26-27. Many of these objects remain absent from collections due to their inherent organic frailty but also their limited life as useful objects. Note that within the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, the categorisation ‘Found Magical Objects’ contains objects such as twigs, stones, shells. This reinforces Smith’s observation regarding the ‘trifling’ nature of some fetish objects. This categorisation remains part of Augustus Pitt Rivers original taxonomy for the display of his collection and reflects the zeitgeist of the time. The museum was founded in 1884.

This period of entanglement¹² of European and African cultures occurred over many hundreds of years of exchange, but it was largely the European worldview that dominated in stories that returned to the European continent. Shelton (1995) argues that the incursion of missionaries and Christianity into the west coast of Africa began a process of admixture of material culture and ideas beginning with the Portuguese attempted colonisation of Guinea in 1482. Christian imagery was incorporated into the existing African institutions and passed on through the lineage of Chiefs, seen as a means of harnessing the power of the Portuguese.¹³ (Figure 2) Leading up to the 19th Century, stories of the exotic, erotic and primal ‘Dark Continent’ pervaded the travelogues and the popular consciousness of Europe.¹⁴ Africa and fetishism became synonymous.



Figure 2. Kongo, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Crucifix with magical contents, Twentieth Century
wood, various organic materials
53.5 x 18 x 13.5 cm
Musée du quai Branly [Inv. 70.2001.32.1]

During the period leading up to the 19th Century, the term fetish seems to largely have been applied only to objects and practices from Africa. Mack (1995) argues that during these periods of colonial expansion and cultural engagement between Europeans and non-European others, the term *fetish* seems reserved for Africa in particular. Despite there being instances of similar objects, such as charms and healing medicines, and practices, such as the invocation of spirits for protection from harm, being encountered in different cultures and continents other than Africa, the term fetish seems not to have been used to describe those instances.¹⁵ (Figure 3) This emphasises a point I will

12. Here I use the terminology as employed by Nicholas Thomas to describe the process by which the material culture of two differing cultural groups become *entangled* through processes of cultural misinterpretation and the valuation of ‘things’. Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled objects: exchange, material culture, and colonialism in the Pacific* (Harvard University Press, 1991).

13. Shelton, “The Chameleon Body: Power, Mutilation and Sexuality,” 19.

14. Ibid., 23.

15. John Mack, “Fetish: Magic Figures in Central Africa,” in *Fetishism : visualising power and desire* ed. Anthony Shelton (London : Brighton : South Bank Centre ; Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, 1995), 53.

reiterate later; that the perception and naming of the fetish occurs by those writing its history.¹⁶ So while we might consider many similar artefacts to fall under the definition of a fetish object, these may have fallen under closely aligned concepts of totemism, animism or idolatry.



Figure 3. Haiti, Carribean
Package with magical-religious cross (voodoo), Twentieth Century
iron, fabric
23.7 x 10.4 x 9.8 cm
Musée Du Quai Branly, Paris. [71.1950.29.4]

16. I follow Michel Foucault here in his argument that the history of power is written by those in power. See Michel Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972). In regard to the historical construction of the fetish as opposed to the idol, see: David Graeber, "Fetishism as social creativity: or, Fetishes are gods in the process of construction," *Anthropological Theory* 5, no. 4 (2005).

Value and Aesthetic Validity

The perception of value of the fetish is what distinguishes it from other mundane objects. The fetish typically manifests intense personal power to those that subscribe to its ideology of power. The relationship to an overestimation of value of the fetish from an outsider's point of view is what often relates to an interpretation of its perversity. Throughout the period of Spanish and Portuguese trade with Africa from the 16th to the 19th centuries, gold was highly prized by the African traders, perhaps even more so than by the Europeans. However, there was willingness to trade gold for European 'trifles', 'trash', and 'trinkets'.¹⁷ It was Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) who seized on this idea of the 'trifle' as a significant indicator that the African mind was uncivilised, even primitive in stature given that it could not sufficiently understand the true value of things.¹⁸ Pietz (1985) notes that it was upon this point for Kant that determined that the African mind was "founded on the principle of 'trifling' (*läppisch*), the ultimate degeneration of the principle of the beautiful because it lacked all sense of the sublime."¹⁹ Pels (1998) argues that Kant here illustrates the attitude of the time, and perhaps still prevailing attitude, that a hierarchy of ideas exists, with rationalism as the pillar of 'civilised' societies and fetishism, 'the religion of materiality, to be the most primitive expression of mankind.'²⁰ The relationship that Kant draws here between the aesthetic principle of the sublime and the principle of trifling, provides a key point in the thread of the fetish aesthetic, one that links with today's usage of the term and the negative associations attached to fetishised proclivities.²¹ It is this proximity of the fetish to the evaluation of the sensuous, the beautiful and the sublime that has placed the fetish into an aesthetic context and therefore aligned with the consideration of art. Importantly, Pietz (1996) shows that the fetish became a means, along with the concept of aesthetics, to examine the effect upon the mind's perception of 'sensuous materiality.'²² Kant's aesthetic theory contributes to fetishism being perceived as having a degenerate character, expressing nothing of the beautiful or the sublime.

The process of assessing fetish value comes from a friction between insider and outsider. There was a curious denial by the European traders of the 17th and 18th centuries that their own gold lust was as equally irrational and arbitrary – a fetish of its own. The definition of the fetish, as Pitez (1985) argues, depends on the perspective of the viewer, whose system of values is being incorporated into the storytelling:

Fetish discourse always posits this double consciousness of absorbed credulity and degraded or distanced incredulity. The site of this latter disillusioned judgment by its very nature seems to represent a power of the ultimate degradation and, by implication, of the radical creation of value.²³

17. ———, "Fetishism as social creativity: or, Fetishes are gods in the process of construction," 412.

18. Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*. (*Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime*).

19. Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, part I," 9.

20. Peter Pels, "The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy," in *Border fetishisms : material objects in unstable spaces*, ed. Patricia Spyer (New York : Routledge, 1998), 111.

21. Kant applies Edmund Burke's categories of the sublime and beautiful from E. Burke, *A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful* (printed for R. and J. Dodsley, 1756).

22. William Pietz, "Fetish," in *Critical terms for art history*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1996), 197-98.

23. ———, "The Problem of the Fetish, part I," 14.

It is the dynamic of the fetish that asks the question: how do we value things? This question of value was a pivotal point for Karl Marx (1818-1883) who likened the African mind of superstition and fetish worship to the Western misrecognition of commodity value.²⁴ This aspect of value is key to the idea of the fetish:

Nineteenth-century economic, sociological, anthropological, and psychological discourses about the fetish all stress the idea of certain material objects as the loci of fixed structures of the inscription, displacement, reversal, and overestimation of value.²⁵

Marx (1842) significantly shifted the gaze of the Occident onto its own capitalist markets, revealing that the process of fetishism was not simply confined to Europe's 'primitive' cousins. This was significant for at the time, Marx was the only one who recognised that the process of fetishisation had little to do with the social Darwinism that was used to support the idea of the fetishist's innate primitivism. What Marx did do was establish theoretical groundwork for thinking about how value is created and maintained within society. This has important implications for the fetishising nature of the art commodity, as I will show in Chapter 3.

Marx seized on the fetish discourse and used it as a means of establishing a comparative form of value between the African driven by 'fancy' for any old trifle, and the European driven by an equally fanciful sensuous desire for the commodity.

Fetishism is so far from raising man above his sensuous desires that, on the contrary, it is 'the religion of sensuous desire.' Fantasy arising from desire [*Die Phantasie der Begierde*] deceives the fetish-worshipper that an 'inanimate object' will give up its natural character in order to comply with his desires [*seiner Gelüste*].²⁶

What is clear to Marx is that the fetish provides a window into the human propensity to animate the world at large, as Taussig (1993) explains:

... 'fetish' as Marx used that term in *Capital* ... refer[s] to the cultural attribution of a spiritual, even godlike, quality to commodities, objects bought and sold on the market standing over their very producers. He could just as well have used the term 'animism'. Under capitalism the animate quality of objects is a result of the radical estrangement of the economy from the person; no longer is man the aim of production, but production is the aim of man, and wealth-getting the aim of production.... *Post-capitalist animism* means that although the socioeconomic exploitative function of fetishism, as Marx used that term in *Capital*, will supposedly disappear with the overcoming of capitalism, fetishism as an active social force

24. The writings of Marx on this point are many. He argues that when the relations between people are objectified, through and into commodities and money, this results in the mystification of human relations. This results in 'commodity fetishism', where the value of the commodity bears no real relationship to the labour to produce that commodity. For Marx's full introduction see: *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Capital: a critique of political economy [Das Kapital, Kritik der politischen Ökonomie] (1867)*. For an examination of the process of consumption, see Daniel Miller, *Material culture and mass consumption* (Oxford, OX, UK ; New York, NY, USA : B. Blackwell, 1987). For a discussion of the specifics of Marx and the fetish, see: Pietz, "Fetishism and Materialism: The limits of Theory in Marx."

25. ———, "The Problem of the Fetish, part I," 9.

26. Karl Marx, *The Leading Article*, 1842: 189 in ———, "Fetishism and Materialism: The limits of Theory in Marx," 136.

inherent in objects will remain. Indeed it must not disappear, for it is the animate quality of things in post-capitalist society without the “banking” mode of perception that ensures what young Marx envisaged as the humanization of the world.²⁷

This tendency to animate the world of objects is the crux of why objects appear to have intentionality or agency over people. The perception of the animacy of things goes to the heart of the perceived power of the fetish, but also to the perceived power of art. There is much speculation on how to appropriately theorise such issues.²⁸ If we consider art as a form of material culture, what methodologies are available to understand the similarities and differences between it and other forms of material culture? I will develop further the ‘animate’ quality of things, and in particular art and the fetish in Chapter 2 and the ways in which these objects are activated by our understanding of our own bodies.

While Marx was focusing on the mystification of the capitalist market, authors such as Edward Tylor (1832-1917) began a cross-cultural appraisal of religious and cultural practices in his study *Primitive Cultures* (1871).²⁹ Tylor originally defined the fetish as only being related to charms, but he was also of the view that the fetish presented an archaic and primitive form of religion. While Tylor did include the folk magic practices of various European cultures and even makes reference to Christian biblical rites, his text serves to reinforce the evolutionist hierarchy of religious practices thought to operate at the time. The sanctified objects celebrated within the Roman Catholic Church place many of its relics in close proximity to the sentiments of the African fetish. Many of the Protestant and Calvinist travellers to Guinea recognised in African fetish worship a similarity to the Catholic’s devotion to material forms of worship.³⁰ The body part of a Saint or scrap of their personal belonging encased in a reliquary serves to focus the prayers and adorations of the faithful, but also acts as a reminder that the prevalence of forms of spiritual mysticism within European religious institutions was commonplace.

Fetish or Idol

The 18th and 19th Century Occidental gaze across Africa was largely informed by the travelogues and the mixed interpretations of missionaries and traders returning to Europe. These initial accounts of Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese merchants were largely framed by their mercantile concerns to make money, a means of conceptualising materiality that was largely missing from

27. Michael T. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, A particular history of the senses (New York: Routledge, 1993), 98-99.

28. Alfred Gell provides some provocative thought with regard to the anthropology of art and the agency with which art appears to exercise. Alfred Gell, “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology,” in *Anthropology, art, and aesthetics*, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); ———, *Art and agency*, an anthropological theory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). For a series of essays exploring Gell’s posthumous *Art and Agency*, see W. J. T. Mitchell, “What Do Pictures “Really” Want?,” *October* 77(1996); Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Thomas, eds., *Beyond aesthetics: art and the technologies of enchantment* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2001). On the contextual and changing life of things—their biography—where it is often the trajectory of an object through the world of commodities that determines its value, see: Igor Kopytoff, “The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process,” in *The Social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

29. Tylor, *Primitive culture*.

30. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part I,” 14.

the African attitude towards these objects (Graeber 2005, 2007; Pietz 1988).³¹ The merchants were largely disinterested in spiritual evaluations of worth, only monetary ones. This differed considerably from the concerns of the missionaries whose goal was to replace idolatry with a belief in the one God. As Graeber (2005) argues:

Some of the items labeled ‘fetishes’ took the form of images, many did not; but verbal compacts and invisible spirits were almost invariably involved. The foreign missionaries who were the first to establish themselves in Imerina, for instance, did not hesitate to label their Merina equivalents ‘idols’ instead of ‘fetishes’, even though *sampy* only rarely took representational form. The difference between Malagasy ‘idols’ and West African ‘fetishes’ seems to be quite simply that the former were first named by missionaries and the latter mainly by merchants, men really only concerned with exchange and questions of material value.³²

The colonialist gaze here filters the inherent differing interests of missionaries and merchants—one that establishes important differences in the classification of material things. Pels (1998) draws the distinction between the fetish and the idol, the latter being concerned with objects that represent some sort of divine power, whereas the fetish is considered to literally be a material manifestation of some abstract power.³³ The European encounter with African fetish practices directly confronted the discrete Catholic categorisation of Religion and idolatry. The idea that the Africans could fancy any ‘trifling’ object for its mere material presence presented a radical departure from the category of idolatry as established in Europe.

Idolatry was the actual worship of a false idol, a representation of a god, typically in some anthropomorphic form. The fetish was therefore removed from any discussions of ‘figurative sculpture’ (Shelton 1995).³⁴ Pietz (1985) reinforces that an idol was heralded as a *representation* of an immaterial form of power; a fetish was literally seen to *be* that power, in a form of ‘untranscended materiality’—a physical presence into which was integrated some metaphysical relationship.³⁵ But towards the end of the 19th Century, the European conception of the fetish became fixed on its relationship to the human body. Perhaps the best known of these are the Congolese nail fetishes, *nikisi*, power figures adorned with nails. (Figures 4 & 5) The hammering of the nails into the figure by the fetish priest (Nganga) (Figure 6) is designed to anger the fetish spirit into action and serve the priest’s call.³⁶ There is speculation that these African figures may have derived from a mixture of Christian and Kongolesse beliefs.³⁷ What is apparent is that the idea of a fetish is constantly reconstructed at the point where two value systems interact, one appropriating or misinterpreting the other.

31. See Graeber, “Fetishism as social creativity: or, Fetishes are gods in the process of construction.”; ———, *Lost people : magic and the legacy of slavery in Madagascar* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 2007); Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part III.”

32. Graeber, “Fetishism as social creativity: or, Fetishes are gods in the process of construction,” 426.

33. Pels, “The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy,” 98.

34. Shelton, “The Chameleon Body: Power, Mutilation and Sexuality,” 19.

35. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part I,” 7.

36. MacGaffey et al., *Astonishment and power*: 27.

37. Shelton, “The Chameleon Body: Power, Mutilation and Sexuality,” 20.



Figure 4. Bakongo, Boma, Zaire

Nkisi Nkondi, c.1878

wood, metal fibre, other materials

117 cm (height)

Africa-Museum, Tervuren, Belgium [7943]

from MacGaffey, Wyatt, Michael D; Harris, Sylvia H; Williams, and David C; Driskell. *Astonishment and Power*. Washington : Published for the National Museum of African Art by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993. 78.



Figure 5. Kongo, Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire)
Kozo, the double-headed dog, late Nineteenth - early Twentieth Century
 wood, nails, cloth, thread
 © Trustees of the British Museum [AOA 1905.5-25.6]



Figure 6. Madzia, French Congo
Nganga, 1912
 The National Museum of Ethnography,
 Stockholm, Sweden
 Photograph by J. Hammar.

“The nganga has mamoni lines around his eyes. His forehead, the seat of understanding, and his fontanelle, the point of contact with spirits, are marked with white spots.”
 from MacGaffey et al. *Astonishment and Power*. 1993: 51.

Making Fetish

The idea that the fetish was a material form of active supernatural power was often linked to its use and construction—often through performance and ritual—the term ‘to make fetish’ being a common one in the travelogues of the 17th and 18th centuries, but also had the meaning *to adorn oneself with a fetish*.³⁸ Mack (1995) describes these first encountered fetish objects from sub-Saharan Africa as having accumulative power; having been made progressively, repetitiously, their coming into being is satisfied through periodic reinforcement of their power.³⁹ Fetishism acts as a point of social creativity, the crucial point being in the *making* of a fetish: ‘a fetish is a god under construction’ as Graeber (2005) argues.⁴⁰ The act of *making, imbibing, incanting, or eating* a fetish was a process by which the social conditions for the recognition of fetish power were created. It is this historicity, or fixation to an originating event or time, that is a necessary condition for the establishment of a fetish.⁴¹ Accounts of Europeans trading with Africans frequently mentioned the ‘making’ of fetish before a transaction could be completed, a process that would involve an agreement over a physical manifestation, a swearing of a ‘fetish-oath’, a sworn agreement over a fetish object, something the Europeans likened to swearing on a Bible in a judicial context.⁴² In 1602 the Dutch merchant Marees wrote:

In their Promises or Oathes which they make unto us, they are unconstant and full of untruth, but such promises as they make among themselves, they keepe and observe them well, and will not breake them: when they make any Oathes or Promises, specially, when they will shew it to our Netherlanders. First, they wipe their faces upon the sole of your foot, and then doe the like upon their shoulders and breasts, and upon all their bodies, speaking thrice each to other, saying, lau, lau, lau, everie time clapping hands together, and stamping with their feet upon the ground, which done they kiss their Fetisso, which they have upon their legges and armes: some for the more assurance of their Promises and Oathes, will drinke certaine drinke, as I have said before: but he that should repose much trust therein, should soonest find himself deceived, because they are not to be credited further than you see them.⁴³

There is a very real association here with witchcraft, as the Europeans understood it. The invocations and rituals used by the Africans did not relate to the God of Marees’ understanding and were therefore considered profane gestures. Marees also treats with suspicion African promises and compacts made with the European traders, their oaths to a heathen god being discounted and untruthful. This relationship of the fetish to a process of conjuration and compact between sorcerer, fetish and adherent, place the bodies of all three agents into a close bond: physically and

38. See fetish, v. *Oxford English Dictionary*. Second edition, 1989; online version September 2011. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/69612>>; accessed 07 October 2011. Earlier version first published in *New English Dictionary*, 1895.

39. Mack, “Fetish: Magic Figures in Central Africa,” 53.

40. Graeber, “Fetishism as social creativity: or, Fetishes are gods in the process of construction,” 427.

41. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part I,” 12; Roy Ellen, “Fetishism,” *Man* 23, no. 2 (1988): 220-23.

42. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part III,” 109.

43. (Marees, p. 319) in Purchas, Samuel, Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes, vol. VI (Glasgow: MacLehose, 1905), pp. 280-81. For the Dutch, see Marees, Pieter de, *Beschryvinghe ende Historische Verhael van het Gout Koninkrijk van Gunee’s-Gravenhage*: Nijhoff, 1912) from ———, “The Problem of the Fetish, part II,” 44-45.

psychically. What is clear is that the power of the fetish manifests through a process of proximity to the bodies of the maker of the fetish, and the body for whom its power is intended. Whether that proximity is a physical connection, or some form of metaphorical association, it seems not to matter. The latitude that is allowed in these correlations is what Mauss and Hubert (1902) refer to as the ‘poorly executed ideogram’,⁴⁴ a form of magical semblance whose similarity is theoretical or abstract. This forms a particularly important point of investigation which has been touched upon already—the degree to which a fetish (and also an art object) can bear no representational likeness to the bodies of those who are beholden to its power, and yet still harness the associational qualities of those bodies.

The Erotics of the Profane and the Perverse

The moral matrix overlaid upon ideas of race, primitivism and sexuality, has far reaching connotations for the material culture in which these attitudes became embodied. Perhaps the most profound relationship that the fetish has to the body is through its relationship to sex and perceptions of aberrant physical morality. The fetish here becomes located as a site for sensuous worship, the dangers of primitive female sexual power, and the materialisation of sexual perversion. The caricature of a depraved and perverse Africa was constructed in the European mind based on such writings as Bosman’s *A New and Accurate Description of the Guinea Coast*, 1702.⁴⁵ Based upon Bosman’s writings the Dutch *philosophe* de Brosse posits a general theory of *fétichisme*.⁴⁶ Through these writings and the rise of social science discourse from the 19th century onwards, the conceptualisation of fetishism in the European worldview would come to include sexual perversity. In anthropology, Edward Tylor and James Frazer (1854-1941) both wrote significant works outlining cross-cultural evaluations of worldwide religions and magico-spiritual beliefs, establishing ideas of sympathy and contagion within the field of magical studies, reinforcing the base nature of fetishism and animist worship.⁴⁷ The concepts of contagion and sympathy largely overlap with meanings established through the body and boundary ideas of pollution and taboo. These ideas are explored in Chapter Two in relation to how objects gain their power and animacy.

Throughout Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries, the perception of the body changed as an object of study through the process of the scientific gaze and the empirical method, changing the way in which the body was represented, especially the inner space of the body.⁴⁸ The Western medical model of the body supplanted the magico-religious model that resided in Western folk magic (witchcraft) and ‘primitive’ culture. In *The History of Sexuality* (1987), Michel Foucault argues

44. Mauss and Hubert, *A General Theory of Magic*: 68.

45. Willem Bosman, *A new and accurate description of the coast of Guinea, divided into the Gold, the Slave, and the Ivory Coasts*, containing a geographical, political and natural history of the kingdoms and countries : with a particular account of the rise, progress and present condition of all the European settlements upon that coast : and the just measures for improving the several branches of the Guinea trade : illustrated with several cutts (Printed for James Knapton ... and Dan. Midwinter, 1705). For a questioning of the accuracy of Bosman’s original text, see: Albert van Dantzig and Willem Bosman, “Willem Bosman’s “New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea”: How Accurate Is It?,” *History in Africa* 1, no. African Studies Association (1974).

46. Charles de Brosses, *Du culte des dieux fétiches ou Parallèle de l’ancienne religion de l’Égypte avec la religion actuelle de Nigritie* (1760). See also Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part III,” 106; Tylor, *Primitive culture*, 2: 143-44.

47. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* [abridged ed.], 1; Tylor, *Primitive culture*.

48. Charles T. Wolfe and Ofer Gal eds., *The body as object and instrument of knowledge : embodied empiricism in early modern science* (Dordrecht, [Netherlands] ; New York : Springer, 2010).

that the systematic codification of sexuality in Europe from the 17th Century onwards, created categorical norms and contra-norms—perversions. Foucault's archaeology of sexuality reveals that within the Enlightenment framework of reason and science, fetishism, as it was interpreted from the African experience, became the 'model perversion'.⁴⁹ Shelton (1995) argues that coupled with the growing sciences of medicine, psychiatry, psychoanalysis and the biological sciences, the body and the legitimacy of sex became limited to the 'normative' function of procreation within the conjugal family.⁵⁰ The relationship of the mysteries of female sexuality became linked with the growing mythology of the exotic fetish practices of primitive societies. Said (1987) argues that European colonial expansion extended not just to a geographic occupation of external territories but also imposed an Occidental conception of the non-European Other as thoroughly exotic and erotic. As European attitudes towards sexuality became more 'civilised', the conception of the exotic Other became closer to a 'natural' state of carnality.⁵¹ (Figure 7)



Figure 7. Dakar, Senegal
Jeunes Féticheuses (Young Sorceresses), Nineteenth Century postcard

"Many of Fortier's pictures must be granted expressivity and esthetic quality. The same gesture of touching a breast as on postcard nr. 14, an imputed proposition and invitation. 'Féticheuses' literally implies worshipping a fetish. The women are thus definitely categorized as something 'other', what we are not, something mysterious and exotic, personifications of a different space, an imaginary world that only was what it was made to be. Colonial photography in a sense was an act of domestication of a foreign and elusive reality, of structuring what appeared to be chaotic, of conjuring the threatening - it was a gesture of submission."

from Corbey, Raymond. "Alterity: The Colonial Nude." *Critique of Anthropology* 8, no. 3 (1988): 90.

The sexualisation of the term fetish provided an analogue from which the 19th Century social scientists could map many of their own theories. The field of psychoanalysis seized upon the perversions of primitive peoples as models for understanding the regressive fixations observed

49. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité (The History of sexuality)*: 53. The relationship of crimes and perversions against sexuality were also leveled against witches, especially in France during the witch craze of the sixteen hundreds. Rendering men impotent, especially newly married men, was one such charge, the perversity being the interference of the natural biological function of sex. See Lee R. Entin-Bates, "Montaigne's Remarks on Impotence," *MLN* 91, no. 4 (1976): 643-44.

50. Shelton, "The Chameleon Body: Power, Mutilation and Sexuality," 26.

51. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge And Kegan Paul, 1978), 190.

in their own patients. For Alfred Binet (1857-1911) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) in particular, the fetish became a means of understanding and labeling a clinical condition studied within their patients. Freud saw the fetish as related to his theories on the Oedipal complex, but before Freud, it was Alfred Binet (1887) that claimed it was the “the same psychological mechanisms responsible for religious superstitions in primitive societies [that] cause sexual perversion in civilised society.”⁵² It was Freud (1921) who became synonymous with the term so I will let him speak for himself:

When now I announce the fetish is a substitute for the penis, I shall certainly create disappointment; so I hasten to add that it is not a substitute for any chance penis, but for a particular and quite special penis that had been extremely important in early childhood but had later been lost. That is to say, it should normally have been given up, but the fetish is precisely designed to preserve it from extinction. To put it more plainly: the fetish is a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and – for reasons familiar to us – does not want to give up.⁵³

This is perhaps the most familiar idea of the fetish object, one that relates to the substitution or denial of loss, particularly of a sexual nature. In Freud's eyes, the true fetishist is predominantly male and the theory is fundamentally phallogocentric, establishing the woman as the absence of the phallus or negative of the male. The position of Freud's patriarchal model of the fetish has received critique from authors such as Naomi Schor (1985) and Elizabeth Grosz (1995), arguing for the possibility of ‘female fetishism’ and ‘lesbian fetishism’ respectively.⁵⁴ Bass (2000) argues that the disavowal of the fetishist operates to eliminate sexual difference, a form of “phallic monism”. The disavowal of sexual dissonance creates within the fetishist an oscillation between reality and fantasy, between castrated and not castrated.⁵⁵ The fetish object then operates to unify the oscillating perspectives, a form of material dialectic, embodying the fantasy of denial in the reality of an object of devotion.

The psychoanalytic position places the fetish squarely in the realm of sexual perversion. And while this may bear no semblance to the actualities of the African worldview, it reiterates the Occidental fascination with the term and the projection of a Eurocentric discourse. It also lays fertile ground, so to speak, for the exploitation of these exotic and sexual tropes by European artists encountering the idea of the fetish for the first time. It does reinforce the relationship of the fetish to the body, and the conception of the fetish as an external organ, a replacement for the mother's missing penis. In this sense it is a body fragment, a part, acting out on behalf of the whole, a synecdoche and metonymy for the body.

52. Alfred Binet, “Le fétichisme dans l'amour,” *Revue Philosophique* 24(1887). Translated by Pietz, “Fetish,” 56.

53. Freud, *On sexuality : three essays on the theory of sexuality, and other works*, 351-52.

54. Schor introduces the term “female fetishism” in her article: Naomi Schor, “Female Fetishism: The Case of George Sand,” *Poetics Today* 6, no. no. 1-2 (1985). See Elizabeth Grosz on lesbian fetishism: Chapter 9 *Lesbian Fetishism* in E. A. Grosz, *Space, time, and perversion: essays on the politics of bodies* (Routledge, 1995). For an examination of the high-phallic imagery involved in the fetish of the ‘money shot’ see: Linda Williams, *Hard core : power, pleasure, and the frenzy of the visible* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1989), 104-18. See Nye for a full examination of the history of the ‘sexual fetish’: Robert A. Nye, “The Medical Origins of Sexual Fetishism,” in *Fetishism as cultural discourse*, ed. Emily Pietz Apter, William (Ithaca, N.Y. : Cornell University Press, 1993).. See Mary Kelly's fetishist take on post-partum sentimentality: Mary Kelly, *Post-partum document* (London ; Boston : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

55. A. Bass, *Difference and disavowal: the trauma of Eros* (Stanford University Press, 2000), 31.

Primitivism, Art and Display

The context of placement of material culture within social, institutional, and individual realms plays an important role in the prescriptions and perceptions of value placed upon things. As I have shown, the perception of value is fundamental to understanding the fetish's power. The incorporation of African fetish artefacts into the collections of 'primitive art' has lead directly to its placement in the museological collections of non-Western cultures. Fetish worship has thus been characterised as 'primitive' through the exoticisation of its associated material culture—and therefore properly within the auspices of the ethnographic rather than the aesthetic—as Myers (2006) argues:

For much of the twentieth century, 'primitive art' defined a category of art that was more or less, the special domain of anthropology—a domain differentiated from the general activity of 'art history' by virtue of being outside the ordinary, linear narratives of (Western) artistic 'progress' in naturalistic representation. Primarily, therefore, non-Western and pre-historic art, 'primitive art' (later to become 'tribal art', the 'art of small-scale societies', and even 'ethnographic art') was most obviously within the purview of ethnographic or natural history rather than 'fine art' museums.⁵⁶

The results of this categorisation of 'primitive art' within the collections of natural history, rather than cultural collections, perpetuates the assumptions that these artefacts belong to the timeless category of 'nature', and therefore, also belongs to a timeless people, also without history. The evaluation of Western fine art against material culture of the primitive Other presents continual definitional issues of art versus artefact⁵⁷ and raises cross-cultural problems with categories of aesthetics (Coote & Shelton 1992; Morphy 1992, 2008; Weiner 1994)⁵⁸ and art (Gell 1992, 1996, 1998; Danto 1989; McEvelley 1989).⁵⁹ I will return to these issues in Chapter Three, however what is of concern at this point is the incorporation of the fetish and its concomitant 'primitive' aesthetics into the Western art model. As I have shown, the relationship of the fetish to the body comes with an aura of loaded aesthetic associations: sexual perversion; the profane and the primitive; the ritualistic and the performative. What I will show in the coming chapters is how these fetish associations are exploited within Western art and how they garner their power from the body through processes of metaphor and metonymy, and materially and conceptually through relationships to abjection and pollution. The tensions between art and artefact, modern

56. Fred Myers, "Primitivism", Anthropology, and the Category of 'Primitive Art', in *Handbook of material culture*, ed. Christopher Tilley and et al (London: Sage, 2006), 268.

57. I refer here to the exhibition ART/ARTIFACT (1988) curated by Susan Vogel, held at the Center for African Art, New York.

58. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton, eds., *Anthropology, art, and aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Howard Morphy, "Aesthetics in a Cross-Cultural Perspective: Some Reflections on Native American Basketry," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 23(1992); ———, *Becoming art*, Exploring cross-cultural categories (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008); J. Weiner, ed. *Aesthetics is a Cross-Cultural Category (Motions by Howard Morphy, Joanna Overing, Secondments by Jeremy Coote, Peter Gow)* (Manchester: Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory, 1994).

59. Arthur Danto, "Artifact and Art," in *Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections*, ed. Susan Vogel (New York: The Center for African Art, 1989); Gell, "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology."; ———, "Vogel's Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps," *Journal of Material Culture* 1, no. 1 (1996); ———, *Art and agency*; Thomas McEvelley, "ART/artifact: What Makes Something Art?," in *Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections*, ed. Susan Vogel (New York: The Center for African Art, 1989).

and primitive, have continued to play out throughout the 20th Century.⁶⁰ The tension between art history and ethnography perhaps culminated in exhibitions such as “*Primitivism*” in 20th century Art; *Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984)⁶¹ and *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989)⁶² which attempted to place so called ‘primitive art’ into the context of traditional art historical institutions—galleries.⁶³ The interplay between the aesthetics of art appreciation and artefact as cultural testimony, today continues to play out within the display strategies of these objects and the institutional contexts in which they are shown.

The maintenance of the concept of ‘primitivism’ allows for the definition of Modernism to exist in contrast, and establish Western art as culturally superior. Foster (1985) argues that Western art defines itself as an exclusive cultural category, outside other forms of cultural production, and therefore separate and superior.⁶⁴ Foster argues art to be a form of fetishism, being made by artists to have power independently of them the moniker of ‘art’ transforming their value and obscuring the source of their agency. Perhaps the aestheticising of ‘Primitivism’ has reached a level of political reflection within the discourses of post-colonialist and post-structuralist theories of academic and cultural institutions, but the material tropes of the untamed and wild ‘primitive’ have been carried within Western popular consciousness along with their traditional biases and misgivings. The material and artefactual shorthand for ‘fetish’ has become ensconced in Western popular culture, much of which can be traced back to Occidental constructs and misinterpretations of the Other. The term ‘fetish’ had thus reached a catalysing moment in the early 20th Century where its use as a negative became solidified within the discourses of Marxist theory, Freudian psychoanalytic theory and anthropological theory.⁶⁵

The concrete material outcomes of what would become known as a fetish within the Western world throughout the 20th Century, owe in large part to their historical construction and continued racial and sexual biases. In Chapter 2 I explore the association of the fetish within the Western application of the term to metaphoric and metonymic bodily meaning, but more specifically, ideas of pollution and contagion. The examination of the fetish and its history within an Occidental worldview provides a genealogy linking it to a contemporary vernacular as well as an understanding of the theoretical discourse which will be discussed in the following section.

60. Compare this with the collections of the 18th and 19th centuries, especially the *Wunderkammer* (‘wonder-room’), where distinctions between art and artefact were irrelevant. See Pels, “The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy.”

61. Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1984

62. Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle at the Parc de la Villette, 1989. Paris

63. For an inversion of this process, Eduardo Paolozzi curated his own artwork alongside artefactual works in the British Museum: Eduardo Paolozzi, *Lost magic kingdoms and six paper moons from Nahuatl: an exhibition at the Museum of Mankind / Eduardo Paolozzi*, ed. British Museum (London: British Museum Publications for the Trustees of the British Museum, 1985).

64. Hal Foster, “The “primitive” unconscious of modern art, or, White skin, black masks,” in *Recodings: art, spectacle, cultural politics* (Port Townsend, Wash: Bay Press, 1985).

65. For a consideration of the normalising of the phallus within Marxist and Freudian fetish discourse, see: T. Chanter, *The picture of abjection*, film, fetish, and the nature of difference (Indiana University Press, 2008).

1.2 Fetish Discourse

The current discourse of the fetish within anthropological literature has developed from the historical framework that I have outlined. I have addressed some of the key points that have been developed by William Pietz (1985, 1987, 1988) and now outline the theoretical context of his work. During the late 19th century, the establishing field of anthropology developed the related concepts of Animism, Fetishism and Idolatry into theoretical models. Tylor (1871) explains his theory:

It seems to me, however, more convenient to use the word Animism for the doctrine of spirits in general, and to confine the word Fetishism to that subordinate department which it properly belongs to, namely, the doctrine of spirits embodied in, or attached to, or conveying influence through, certain material objects. Fetishism will be taken as including the worship of ‘stocks and stones,’ and thence it passes by an imperceptible gradation into Idolatry.⁶⁶

The distinctions between the material, sensuous, and immaterial, non-sensuous realms were fundamental to understanding how to differentiate categories of animism, idolatry and fetishism. Often the separation was difficult to discern and the categories themselves unclear and indistinct theoretically. Important to Tylor’s conception of the fetish was also an aligned theory of sympathetic magic, where the perceived power of one object or substance might be sympathetically transferred to another through some familiar association of similarity. Frazer (1925) developed Tylor’s ideas on magic and of the fetish in his extensive *The Golden Bough: A study in Magic and Religion*, extending magical sympathy to include principles of contagion, incorporating the transference of contiguous properties to obtain desired effects.⁶⁷

The end of the 19th Century saw African fetishism adopted by Western sociological and psychological theorists. Marx (1867) used the African fetish as means for understanding capitalist modes of production while Binet (1887) and Freud (1921) adopted fetishism as the model sexual perversion.⁶⁸ The divergent theoretical expectations of the fetish resulted in a period of its own disavowal within the field of anthropology, as Adam (1940) exemplifies:

Even a so-called fetish, which is believed to be inhabited by a spirit, is ultimately nothing but mana. Anthropologists of to-day are inclined to eliminate fetish and fetishism from their vocabulary, since the words suggest so many different meanings that it is better to abolish them altogether.⁶⁹

However, some found its association with the concept of *mana* less derisive, and the energetic properties that it conceptualised were not simply limited to a ‘primitive’ predilection for animist behaviors as Bernard (1938) argues:

66. Tylor, *Primitive culture*, 2: 144.

67. Frazer’s work, *The Golden Bough*, was originally published in 1890 in two volumes, by its third edition in 1906-15 was up to 12 volumes. The work referenced throughout this text is a later published, abridged single volume edition: Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion [abridged ed.]*, 1.

68. Marx and Engels, *Capital: a critique of political economy [Das Kapital, Kritik der politischen Ökonomie]*; Binet, “Le fétichisme dans l’amour.”; Freud, *On sexuality: three essays on the theory of sexuality, and other works*.

69. L. Adam, *Primitive Art*, ed. H. L. Beales and W. E. Williams, Pelican Books (Harmondsworth. New York.: Penguin Books, 1940), 43.

Although fetishes were most characteristically associated with early primitive men, they still survive in such forms as President Woodrow Wilson's 'buckeye' which he carried around with him, the Negro's rabbit foot, the amulet of the superstitious, or the stock-market gambler's favorite pencil. Naturally, the fetish must be something with which the individual may establish a special magical relationship, whose 'mana,' or 'will power,' he may control.⁷⁰

Adam's comments reflect the difficult history of the usage of the term 'fetish', but emphasise the idea of *mana*, something akin to the concept of a soul or spirit, with the ability to 'animate' people, animals and things.⁷¹ Just as 'making fetish' involves metaphorical processes of consuming, imbibing, or anointing, the fetish object, attached to this sensibility is the transference of some intangible force, what Frazer had characterised as the contagious behavior of magical effects. This relationship of action and associational power based on value somehow located in a physical object is a recurring and important theme that defines fetish discourse, and implicates the body's performative role in defining the perception of a fetish's power.

Marcel Mauss discounted the use of the term 'fetishism' within ethnographic studies as simply "an immense misunderstanding between two civilizations, the African and the European."⁷² However, it was Mauss' work, *The Gift* (1967 [1925]) that established that the exchange objects of pre-capitalist societies were "personified beings that take part in the contract. They state their desire to be given away."⁷³ Koytoff (1986) and Stallybrass (1998) observe that "the radically dematerialized opposition between the individual and his or her 'possessions' (between subject and object) is one of the central ideological oppositions of capitalist societies."⁷⁴ A recognition that capitalist modes of production and consumption operated to shift cultural perspectives of the individual relationship to the material world of objects (especially commodities) would continue to play out in reference to the use of the term 'fetish'.

In his essay *Fetishism and Ideology: The Semiological Reduction* (1970), Baudrillard revisits Marx's conception of the fetish and his definition of use-value. Baudrillard reiterates and perhaps over-capitalises upon the history of the term fetish (from the Latin: *facare*) stating it has always amounted to a fabrication of illusions. "The metaphor of fetishism, wherever it appears, involves a fetishisation of the conscious subject or of a human essence, a rationalist metaphysic that is at

70. L. L. Bernard, "The Unilateral Elements in Magic Theory and Performance," *American Sociological Review* 3, no. 6 (1938): 777. The reference to President Woodrow Wilson's "buckeye" in this context is likely the nut of the buckeye tree, of the genus *Aesculus*, the seeds of which are similar to chestnuts.

71. "He [primitive man] and other putative 'objects with power' were, he supposed, able to cause things to happen, according to their wishes or wills. This conception of 'will,' or mana, is of course not the modern psychological concept of will as we hold it, but the primitive notion of will, or mana, conceived as a mysterious, detached power residing in the person, animal, or thing, able to cause the desired result. When early man came, somewhat later, to the conception of a god, this god also possessed this same mystical mana or will power and caused things to happen by acts of will or by fiat. This power was retained even in a pantheistical conception of the supernatural and in the metaphysical conception of Natural Law." Ibid., 774.

72. Mauss in Pietz, "Fetish," 202. It is unclear where Pietz obtains this quote within Mauss' writings.

73. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. Ian Gunnison, Forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies (New York: International Publishers, 1967 [1925]), 55.

74. Peter Stallybrass, "Marx's Coat," in *Border fetishisms: material objects in unstable spaces*, ed. Patricia Spyer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 187. See also Koytoff, "The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process," 64.

the root of the whole system of occidental Christian values.”⁷⁵ Baudrillard’s arguments remove the fetish from the substance of the signified and claim its perverse attachment to the signifier, in an endless system of signs, claiming that Marx’s conception of use-value was itself a fetish.⁷⁶

In the 1980’s, primarily as a result of the work of Michael Taussig’s study, *The devil and commodity fetishism in South America* (1980), fetish discourse was reconsidered within anthropology. Developing Marx’s concept of the commodity fetish, Taussig examined newly formed capitalist economies in Colombia and Bolivia. Taussig examined the practices of some of the displaced Afro-American wage workers in Colombia as cane-cutters entering into deals with the devil in order to secure greater financial returns, and similar practices adopted by Indian workers in the Bolivian mines. These returns were indebted to be spent upon unnecessary consumer goods and those that entered these bargains were expected to die a miserable death. Taussig argues that by focusing on these peripheral cultures who are newly engaged with capitalist modes of production, as opposed to peasant modes of production, a point of cultural fissure occurs and elucidates the ideological blind spots those of us inherit from our own capitalist worldviews. The worldviews and values of the previously agrarian and peasant systems of production in Bolivia and Colombia, attempt to assimilate the newly introduced capitalist systems of beliefs regarding production of capital for the sake of accumulating greater capital without end. In this process of entangled and entwined belief systems coming into collision, processes of fetishisation often occur, creating new heightened objects of value. In the context of Taussig’s observations, the newly introduced system of ‘capital’ became incorporated into existing belief systems, becoming reflected as an indigenous understanding—a compact with the devil.

A theoretical discourse has been proposed by Pietz (1985, 1987, 1988), attempting to theorise the ‘problem of the fetish’.⁷⁷ Despite the historical complexity and breadth of theoretical application of fetishism, Pietz argues that some unifying principles exist from which he defines his proposed requirements. These principles have since been debated and furthered (Appadurai 1986; Ellen 1988; Apter & Pietz 1993; Shelton 1995; Spyer 1998; Graeber 2005).⁷⁸ I will outline briefly the defining work of William Pietz in the field of fetishism within anthropology and focus on his concept of ‘untranscended materiality’ and its relationship to the body and the immaterial. These concepts will act as touchstones throughout the rest of the dissertation from which I will focus on the relationships between Pietz’s conception of the fetish and meaning generated through the body.

Pietz regards the following four conditions common to what has been historically considered a fetish:

Four themes consistently inform the idea of the fetish: (1) the untranscended

75. J. Baudrillard, “Fetishism and Ideology: The Semiological Reduction,” in *For a critique of the political economy of the sign* (Telos Press, 1981), 89.

76. Ibid., 93.

77. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part I.”; ———, “The Problem of the Fetish, part II.”; ———, “The Problem of the Fetish, part III.”; Michael T. Taussig, *The devil and commodity fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

78. Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction,” in *The Social life of things : commodities in cultural perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1986); Apter and Pietz, *Fetishism as cultural discourse*; Ellen, “Fetishism.”; Graeber, “Fetishism as social creativity: or, Fetishes are gods in the process of construction.”; Shelton, *Fetishism : visualising power and desire*; Spyer, *Border fetishisms : material objects in unstable spaces*.

materiality of the fetish: ‘matter,’ or the material object, is viewed as the locus of religious activity or psychic investment; (2) the radical historicity of the fetish’s origin: arising in a singular event fixing together otherwise heterogenous elements, the identity and power of the fetish consists in its enduring capacity to repeat this singular process of fixation, along with the resultant effect; (3) the dependence of the fetish for its meaning and value on a particular order of social relations, which it in turn reinforces; and (4) the active relation of the fetish object to the living body of an individual: a kind of external controlling organ directed by powers outside the affected person’s will, the fetish represents a subversion of the ideal of the autonomously determined self. (“Fetishism” treats the self as necessarily and in essence embodied.)⁷⁹

Were one to elaborate a theory of the fetish, one might then adopt the following as fundamental categories: historicization, territorialization, reification, and personalization. The fetish is always a meaningful fixation of a singular event; it is above all an ‘historical’ object, the enduring material form and force of an unrepeatable event. This object is ‘territorialized’ in material space (an earthly matrix), whether in the form of a geographical locality, a marked site on the surface of the human body, or a medium of inscription or configuration defined by some portable or wearable thing. The historical object is territorialised in the form of a ‘reification’: some thing (*meuble*) or shape whose status is that of a self-contained entity identifiable within the territory. It is recognizable as a discrete thing (*a res*) because of its status as a significant object within the value codes proper to the productive and ideological systems of a given society. This reified, territorialised historical object is also ‘personalised’ in the sense that beyond its status as a collective social object it evokes an intensely personal response from individuals. This intense relation to the individual’s experience of his or her own living self through an impassioned response to the fetish object is always incommensurable with (whether in a way that reinforces or cuts) the social value codes within which the fetish holds the status of a material signifier.⁸⁰

Pietz acknowledges that the concept of the fetish is a ‘factitious universal’, its only commonality is the usage of the term itself and so his examination involves a necessary historicising, which is in turn a fundamental aspect of the creation of the fetish, its unique synthesis of time, territory and value. The conflation of the sensuous materiality of the fetish and the non-sensuous nature, or its immateriality, has been characterised as ‘untranscended materiality’—this being a conjunction of the fetish’s territorialisation (materiality) and its reification (concretisation of its transcendent or metaphysical qualities).⁸¹ The resulting characterisation creates a liminal object, an object personified and incorporated into the body of its adherents.

The difficulty that the fetish poses—and in a similar way the difficulties that arise with the characterisation of some art—is its conjunction of materiality and immateriality, a form of

79. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part II,” 23.

80. ———, “The Problem of the Fetish, part I,” 12.

81. Ibid., 7-8.

‘untranscended materiality’. The fetish proper, as Ellen (1988) states, is something that is perceived as a “conflation of signifier and signified”, not a container or representation but a physical presence of the supernatural or metaphysical.⁸² The recurrence of the concept of ‘untranscended materiality’ is perhaps the most unyielding across fetish literature.⁸³ This material presence is key to its ‘sensuous materiality’, but also to the realisation of its immaterial content. Just as the Catholic Eucharist literally becomes Christ’s flesh, so the fetish is seen as the material embodiment of the power it is said to incorporate. This has powerful similarities with the material reification of the art object. The necessity of the fetish to incorporate some metaphysical property is the nature of its role, to concretise the abstract; to make tangible the unspeakable concepts of gods and spirits, dead ancestors and phallic mothers. The material object that becomes the fetish then acts in a unique way, a means of realising those principles, ideas or concepts not fit for language and explicit evocation. A means of meaning making through the world of material objects that makes tangible and sensuous, and therefore irrefutable, those forms of knowledge that one cannot ‘touch’ otherwise.

Treating the abstract as if it had a material existence is known as reification. This idea of incorporating an abstraction or metaphysical conception into materiality is something that both the fetish and art share. The term has an extensive application within Marxist thought, being related to the objectifying of relations between people as if they were ‘things’ and treating things as if they were personified. After Marx, Lukács (1971) developed the concept further:

A relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a ‘phantom objectivity’, an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.⁸⁴

Lukács is here referring to the nature of the commodity to lose any reference to its labor value, becoming the ‘phantom objectivity’ of commodity fetishism. This action of reification occurs as part of the making and re-enacting of the fetishes’ power, what Pietz (1985) refers to as ‘singularity and repetition’:

The fetish has an ordering power derived from its status as the fixation or inscription of a unique originating event that has brought together previously heterogeneous elements into a novel identity...But the heterogeneous components appropriated into an identity by a fetish are not only material elements; desires and beliefs and narrative structures establishing a practice are also fixed (or fixated) by the fetish, whose power is precisely the power to repeat its originating act of forging an identity of articulated relations between certain otherwise heterogeneous things.⁸⁵

82. Ellen, “Fetishism,” 219.

83. For example see: Nicole Boivin, *Material cultures, material minds*, the impact of things on human thought, society, and evolution (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2008), 105; Pels, “The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy,” 91; Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part I,” 7.

84. György Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” in *History and class consciousness: studies in Marxist dialectics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 83.

85. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part I,” 7-8.

The power of the fetish to invest within it the abstract and immaterial realm of human ‘desires and beliefs and narrative structures’ enables it to act socially and personally. Those fetish objects that ‘hold’ desires and beliefs begin to expose the complex relationship between the self and the material world.

The concept of the material becomes ever more complicated by the social and cultural overlays that filter our perceptions. Brown (2001), argues that perception of things occurs as a materiality effect, the experience of materiality occurs “by means of a particular ‘socialization of the psyche’ then, ‘each society’ imposes itself on the subject’s senses, on the ‘corporeal imagination’ by which materiality as such is apprehended.”⁸⁶ Nick Thomas (1991) explains the materiality effect:

As socially and culturally salient entities, objects change in defiance of their material stability. The category to which a thing belongs, the emotion and judgement it prompts, and narrative it recalls, are all historically refigured.⁸⁷

One may assume that the materiality, the physicality of an object is an immovable fact but, as Pels (1998) states, the physicality of things can carry over across contexts of human behavior. This is dependent upon the “[r]ecognition of materiality in social process, by systematically treating materiality as a quality of *relationship* rather than of things”⁸⁸ Importantly this defines our relationship to the materialisation of the fetish as a relationship to its material form as well as its reified ‘persona’. The negotiation between subject and object establishes a form of communication and negotiation between the material and immaterial worlds, as Daniel Miller (1987) has argued:

The importance of this physicality of the artifact derives from its ability to act as a *bridge*, not only between the mental and physical worlds, but also, more unexpectedly, between consciousness and unconsciousness.⁸⁹ [my emphasis]

Pels (1998) goes further than this by claiming that the fetish moves beyond any Saussurian system of signification, of materiality being an empty signifier, but instead an “occult counterpoint that marks the limits of a dominant discourse of representation.”⁹⁰ Here we begin to see the fetish as a liminal object,⁹¹ an object performing as a subject and vice versa, in a state of continual reappraisal. The process by which one comes to accept an object as a fetish is key to understanding its power, one that relates to its historicisation; the moment of its inception and impression of value upon the fetishist.

Since the 18th Century, the vernacular usage of the term ‘fetish’ carries with it strong associations of racial, sexual and superstitious concerns of the modernising Western worldview. The term fetish

86. Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 5.

87. Thomas, *Entangled objects: exchange, material culture, and colonialism in the Pacific*. 125.

88. Pels, “The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy,” 99-100. For a critique of Pels thoughts here see: P. Keurs, *Condensed reality: a study of material culture ; case studies from Siassi (Papua New Guinea) and Enggano (Indonesia)* (CNWS Publications, 2006), 35-37.35-37.

89. Miller, *Material culture and mass consumption*: 99.

90. Pels, “The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy,” 112.112.

91. I refer here to van Geneep’s use of the term Liminal as the second stage in the three stages of ritual progression. The liminal stage (transition) exists as a threshold state or boundary exiting between the pre-liminal, separation, and post-liminal, incorporation. Arnold Van Gennep, *The rites of passage* trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London : Routledge & K. Paul, 1960), 11.

has been attached to base and negative social prejudices since its inception on the Guinea coast of Africa. These associations carry with them strong relationships to the bodies of those who fell into a perception of fetish power. The aberrational, profane nature of the fetish acts in stark contrast to the aesthetics of the sublime and the beautiful, and yet the abject nature of the fetish places it on the same coin as sublimity, one needing the other for its definition. The profound feeling of horror and exhilaration that the sublime engenders would not be possible without the power of the abject, an acknowledgement of the horror of that which is part of the self but cannot be incorporated. These strong emotional and physical responses place the aesthetic concerns of the fetish in contact with the body—as a part removed from the body. Pietz (1985) describes the fetish with reference to the surrealist Michel Leiris (1927):

...the fetish is then, first of all, something intensely personal, whose truth is experienced as a substantial movement from 'inside' the self (the self as totalized through an impassioned body, a 'body without organs') into the self-limited morphology of a material object situated in space 'outside.'⁹²

The fetish here transgresses the boundary of the body, between the inner and outer. The physical boundary of the skin is transgressed, but also the perceptual boundary of the self and other. This profound connection to the body through the fetish's abject nature, establishes forms of sympathetic and contagious connections to the body. These connections relate to meaning established through the body, through a sensuous relationship with the material world. This form of affective and embodied meaning operates as a matrix from which language and thought map metaphoric and metonymic associations.

While the incorporation of the idea of material metaphors continues to imply forms of signification through objects, I follow Tilley (1999) and Boivin (2008) in their assertions that material culture also operates experientially to manifest unique renderings of knowledge, not simply as containers of symbolic value.⁹³ In this sense, the fetish acts as an extreme form of material culture, one that enacts and embodies the significance of social relations but continues to operate individually, as a perceived extension of the body. This extension of the self into the material world of things complicates assumptions about the passive nature of inert matter. Perceptions of the animacy and agency of objects follow, but to what extent can these relationships to fetishes be understood as truly animate? The extension of the body through principles of metaphor and metonymy to the inanimate world of objects, creates a sense of life in objects. The reification of body metaphors operates to enact 'magical' properties within otherwise lifeless matter; metaphors that operate even without resort to language or conception.

92. Quotations from Michel Leiris translated by Pietz: Leiris, Michel "Alberto Giacometti," Documents, vol. I, no. 4 (1929): 209 in Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, Part I," 11-12.

93. Boivin, *Material Cultures, Material Minds : The Impact of Things on Human Thought, Society, and Evolution*, C.Y. Tilley, *Metaphor and Material Culture* (Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

CHAPTER 2: EMBODIED MAGIC

This chapter establishes three key points that relate the body materially and conceptually to fetish power. Firstly, how meaning is constructed through the processes of embodiment, metaphor and practice. Secondly, how the material world comes to inherit personified attributes, or agency over people. And thirdly, how the relationships of body meaning and material agency relate to magical fetish power through processes of sympathy and contagion, bridging the body and the material world. The materiality of the fetish acts as an *interface* to an immaterial form of meaning, making the abstract reified in tangible form. The power of that tangibility exploits sensuous perceptions of abjection and liminality.

Fundamental to abject and liminal states of the body are our constructions of pure and impure, clean and dirty. The perception of purity relates strongly to body metaphors being mapped onto objects, establishing a perception of their personification.¹ Current debates surrounding the agency of objects acknowledge that objects can have power over people.² The questions relating to material agency bear direct relevance to the exploration of the fetish and the art object. The materiality effect of the fetish and the art objects act, as Miller (1987) argues, as interfaces between the “mental and physical worlds, but also... between consciousness and unconsciousness.”³ It is this intrinsic physical and psychic entanglement between body and object that creates fetish power and relates to fetish power in art.

2.1 Constructing Meaning through the Body

To first understand how the body ‘activates’ and ‘animates’ fetish objects, I will establish how meaning is generated through the body and its relation to the material world. Traditional views place objects as a discrete category separate from the subject, however this is complicated by fetish discourse and by recent theories of material culture.⁴ The fetish object and art object exist as sensuous things, realisations of material culture. As such, I argue that their materiality influences the ways in which knowledge and meaning are located within them. To establish the location of knowledge within bodies and objects, I will explore three theories relating to bodily meaning and the material world. Firstly, I look at how embodied meaning is generated through the body and then mapped metaphorically to other forms of knowledge. Secondly, I consider an extension of everyday habitual knowledge to the material world of objects. Thirdly, I look at the entanglement of knowledge between people and things as a form of hybridity, where objects act as interfaces to knowledge.

1. See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

2. For example see Gell, *Art and agency*; Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris, eds., *Material Agency: Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach* (Springer, 2008); B. Latour, *We have never been modern* (Harvard University Press, 1993).

3. Miller, *Material culture and mass consumption*: 99.

4. For a review of material culture generally see: Carl Knappett, *Thinking through material culture*, an interdisciplinary perspective (Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Christopher Tilley and et al, eds., *Handbook of material culture* (London : Sage, 2006); Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell, *Thinking through things : theorising artefacts in ethnographic perspective*; Boivin, *Material cultures, material minds*; Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry, eds., *The Oxford handbook of material culture studies* (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2010).

Embodied Meaning and Metaphor Theory

The point at which language might be said to ‘fail’ as a descriptor or model for understanding ‘things’ must yield to an understanding that not all meaning is based upon language. The work of Johnson and Lakoff (1980) on metaphor theory argue for a bridge between abstract thought and meaning generated through the body’s experience of a sensuous world.⁵ Metaphor theory provides a means to understand the relationship between fetish power and the transference of bodily meaning to objects. The theorisation of metaphor establishes a connection with Frazer’s laws of sympathy and contagion and allows us to create a model for connecting the body and objects in a meaningful way.

To understand what we consider contagious and sympathetic, I will look at the argument that the body metaphorically maps to abstract thought at a non-conscious level, as a process of meaning which is made prior to, and with the development of, language learning. I will focus on the ideas of Johnson and Lakoff’s (1980) ‘conceptual metaphor theory’ to understand how abstract conceptions are generated from the body, but also provide an insight into the extent to which the body and metaphor can extend to embed the abstract body into an object. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) provide a shorthand critique of the abstract disembodied mind with three points: “the mind is inherently embodied, thought is mostly unconscious and abstract concepts are mostly metaphorical.”⁶ The last point links perception and conception, where traditionally the assumption that observable thought was a proof for a severable consciousness, it is now understood that most abstract thought is based upon perceptual experience (Bloch, 1995; Damasio, 1994).⁷ Abstract thought operates as a metaphor of bodily action, as Johnson (2007) states:

Conceptual metaphor theory proposes that nearly all abstract conceptualization works via conceptual metaphor, conceptual metonymy, and a few other principles of imaginative extension. These high level, systematic metaphors are usually complex combinations of more basic metaphors—called ‘primary metaphors’ by Joseph Grady (1997)—that arise naturally from our embodied experience.⁸

Johnson provides an exemplary list of Grady’s primary metaphoric relations:

Affection is warmth, Important is big, More is up/Less is down, Organization is physical structure, Happy is up/Sad is down, States are locations, Causes are forces, Causation is forced motion, Purposes are destinations, Time is Motion, Control is Up, Knowing is seeing, Help is Support, Difficulties are Burdens, Categories are Containers, and Understanding is Seeing.⁹

5. Mark Johnson and George Lakoff, *Metaphors we live by* (Chicago : The University Of Chicago Press, 1980).

6. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the flesh : the embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought* (New York : Basic Books, 1999), 3.

7. For example see: Maurice Bloch, “Questions not to ask of Malagasy carvings,” in *Interpreting Archaeology: Finding Meaning in the Past*, ed. I. Hodder, et al. (London: Routledge, 1995), 157-58. Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes’ error : emotion, reason, and the human brain* (New York : G.P. Putnam, 1994).

8. Johnson, *The meaning of the body*: 178.

9. Ibid., 179. Quoting Joseph Grady, “Foundations of Meaning: Primary Metaphors and Primary Scenes” (PhD diss., University of California, 1997).

I question the cross cultural universality of Grady's specific metaphors, but Johnson and Lakoff's point is to establish how embodied meaning builds abstract conceptualisation. We understand these phrases from our own corporeal knowledge. Examples of body metaphors exist in the treatment of fetish objects such as the *boli* (Figure 8), an object whose power is *nourished* with the feeding of blood and other life giving substances. *Boli* power operates through the metaphor of feeding. Similarly, the action of nailing the *nikisi* by the ritual priest, angers and provokes the fetish to attend to its invoked task. Tilley (2002) explains the relation of metaphor, the body and objects:

As differing modes of communication the linguistic forms of words and the material forms of artefacts play complementary roles in social life. What links together language use and the use of things is that both arise as products of an embodied human mind, i.e. a mind that makes sense of and intervenes in the worlds through the sensuous and carnal capacities of the human body...I argue that language use is thoroughly metaphorical in nature. Our speech is laden with metaphors because we think metaphorically. The material counterpoint to verbal metaphor is the solid metaphors objectified in the forms of artefacts. Metaphors and metonymy (part-whole relations) allow us to see similarity in difference and permit us to connect the world together.¹⁰

Body metaphors build abstract meaning through perceptions of the physical world. One important perception relates to the boundaries of the body, perceptions of inside and outside. Douglas (1969) argues the body is a matrix that orders such concepts as the pure and the dangerous; the clean and the dirty. Perceptions of cleanliness and dirtiness relate to the transgression of metaphoric boundaries of the body. Dirt is "matter out of place".¹¹ For Douglas, the body is a relative conceptualisation, dependent upon cultural and personal difference. What is polluting to some may be cleansing to others, and these categories may also shift back and forth. The danger of the fetish relates to its transgression of boundaries, to be part of the body and separate from it simultaneously. This dissertation focuses on the Occidental tropes used to construct the fetish and art history discourses. The categorisation of the body within those discourses assumes a Western individuated sense of the body, the body viewed as a discrete bounded object that locates the self.¹² Anything that threatens a breakdown of those boundaries is perceived as dangerous. The fetish utilises strategies to break down the perceptions of the contained self.

10. Christopher Tilley, "Metaphor, Materiality and Interpretation," in *The material culture reader*, ed. V. Buchli (Berg, 2002), 24.

11. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*: 40.40.

12. I accept the position that ultimately one must give way to ontologies of the self as argued in Strathern's case of the 'dividual' (see Marilyn Strathern, *The gender of the gift*, problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 13, 15.). Henare (2007) develops Strathern's concept of the 'dividual' to develop a methodology into the relations between things and concepts (Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell, "Introduction: thinking through things," in *Thinking through things : theorising artefacts in ethnographic perspective*, ed. Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York : Routledge, 2007), 19-20. Notably Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies* (1994) provides a feminist critique of traditional mind/body dualisms, arguing for a conceptualization of the self based upon the corporeal subject. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*.



Figure 8. Banama, Mali
Kono cult object (boli), Twentieth Century
 coagulated animal blood, wood, wax, earth, vegetable fibre, organic materials
 70 x 55 x 35 cm
 Musée Du Quai Branly [Inv 70.2006.17.1]

“The boli allows harnessing, accumulating and controlling a vital energy, the nyama, a sort of natural and spiritual force...fashioned, according to a highly complex symbolism and ritual, from an amalgam of various fragments: wood, bark, leaves, mud, leather, cotton thread, bone, hair, claws, fangs, blood, and other animal and human body parts, such as placenta, phalanx, etc. For these veritable condensed forms of mineral, animal and vegetal forces to take effect, they need to be flattered by active words, looked after by subtle sprinklings and fed by bloody sacrifices. The crusty glaze, fashioned with cream of millet and dried blood, as well as vegetable powder and cola nuts chewed and then spat out during prayers and sacrifices addressed to Kono testify to the oldness and the force of the object.”

Le Fur, Yves, ed. *Musée Du Quai Branly: The Collection: Art from Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas*. Flammarion, 2009, 50.

Practice and the Materiality of Habitude

The world of action, and by extension, the objects associated with those actions, operate to map meaning that is both conceptual and non-conceptual. How the body creates meaning within objects is largely not based in language. Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) argues that "rites, more than any other type of practice, serve to underline the mistake of enclosing in concepts a logic meant to dispense with concepts".¹³ For Bourdieu (1990), rites are what we do, because they are 'the done thing to do' or the 'right thing to do at the time' but also because one cannot do otherwise, the very meaning of these habitual acts are justified purely by their performance.¹⁴ As we have seen in Chapter 1, there is a matrix of the body, action and the fetish that historicises the moment of fetish creation. That moment connects the social, the personal and the historical with the material (fetish), and is 'practice' in Bourdieu's terminology. The application of Bourdieu's practice theory and related ideas of habitual performance will be used to examine the relationship between material culture and 'practice' based meaning located within the body.

The body acts as a sensuous receptor to create metaphorical meaning, but it also enacts meaning through performance or daily habitual 'practice'. Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'practice' encompasses ritual and rites, but also the everyday habitual relations between people. Boivin (2009) suggests that 'practice' could incorporate material culture, a point I would like to explore.¹⁵ The body was the focus of Bourdieu's cultural analysis. He argues that through the body we are invested with the cultural knowledge through the performance of the everyday. Bourdieu incorporates the body as a site of social and personal meaning. The body habitually acts out knowledge every day. Objects 'hold' knowledge that the body interfaces with, enacting that knowledge in a unique synthesis of body and object, as Bourdieu (1977):¹⁶

If all societies and, significantly, all the "totalitarian institutions"...that seek to produce a new man through a process of 'deculturation' and 'reculturation' set such store on the seemingly most insignificant details of *dress, bearing*, physical and verbal *manners*, the reason is that, treating the body as a memory, they entrust to it in abbreviated and practical, i.e. mnemonic, form the fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of the culture. The principles embodied in this way are played beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot even be made explicit; nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and therefore, more precious, than the values given body, *made* body by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as 'stand up straight' or 'don't hold your knife in your left hand.'¹⁷

13. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1977), 116.

14. P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford University Press, 1990; reprint, Revised), 18.

15. Boivin, *Material cultures, material minds*: 163-64.

16. Gosden (2006) discusses the ability of objects to maintain their own channels of formal and logical coherence over long-periods of time. These object 'channels' become reinforced over human generations. Chris Gosden, "Material Culture and Long-Term Change," in *Handbook of material culture*, ed. Christopher Tilley and et al (London : Sage, 2006), 425-42.

17. Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*: 94.

Apart from the explicit political implications for control of the body, Bourdieu re-imagines the power relations between people and the material world. This might be imagined as a banal physical response to the way in which the body's posture is enforced by the form of a chair, or the hand to a knife. Or the inverse, how a fork informs the method of eating, or a chair dictates a worldview of sitting, comfort and relaxation. Utilitarian objects have a clear relationship to the body and their intended use, but Bourdieu's point is that the banal strictures of everyday gestures indicate knowledge within the body and the objects around it.

The implications of Bourdieu's model can be illustrated simply by the work, *The way we eat* (2009) (Figure 9) by Liu Xiaoxian, which demonstrates the cultural ascriptions we inherit through something as simple as eating a meal. The work displays the eating utensils of East and West, a single pair of chopsticks juxtaposed with 40 items of flatware. The eating utensils and the deportment associated with them, implicates a complex worldview of manner, hierarchy and culture. The 'habits' of eating are ascribed, learnt and practiced.¹⁸ The habitual knowledge of eating may never become explicit or conceptualised by those entangled in their customs. The matter of eating is a simple case of body knowledge and the way in which objects carry meaning beyond the body. Meaning is conceptualised through the practice of eating, an act that is innately sensual and corporeal. Bourdieu's model of practice offers a way to understand the non-sensual (abstract) presence of knowledge within objects.

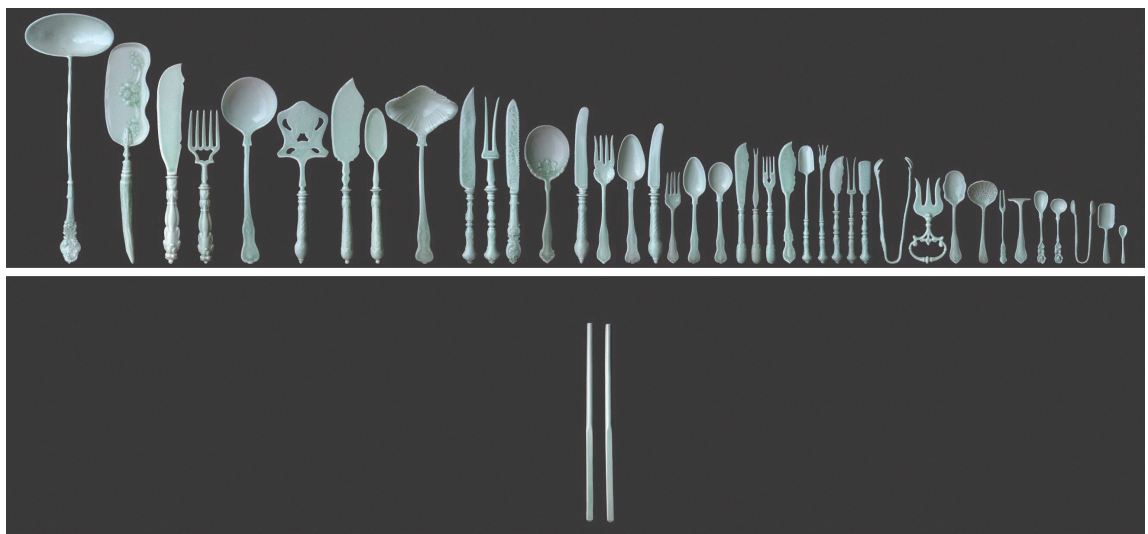


Figure 9. Liu Xiaoxian
The way we eat, 2009
 40 pieces cutlery + 2 chopsticks; porcelain with celadon glaze
 sizes variable
 NSW Gallery, Sydney [11.2010.a-pp]

18. Bourdieu expresses particular consideration of the act of eating and its cultural (and political) implications. See ———, *Distinction*, a social critique of the judgement of taste (Harvard University Press, 1984), 179-80. See also on Bourdieu, practice and eating: David Sutton, "Cooking Skills, the Senses and Memory: The Fate of Practical Knowledge," in *Sensible objects : colonialism, museums, and material culture*, ed. Elizabeth; Edwards, Chris; Gosden, and Ruth B. ; Phillips (Oxford ; New York : Berg, 2006).

Meaning produced through the body may operate outside the logic of language and representation. As Bourdieu suggests of rites, perhaps embodied knowledge operates outside conceptual analysis. Bloch (1992) suggests that the limits of representational forms of analysis (linguistic models) are unable to fully describe social actors and the cultural meanings of practice. The nature of bodily habits and object meaning is to remain largely unspoken and therefore not conceptualised. Ethnographic ‘testimony’ from the daily practitioners of culture is not to be trusted, according to Bloch. The reason for this rests upon Bloch’s understanding that cultural formation is mostly a non-linguistic process, being embodied and material.¹⁹ It is in question how much of this knowledge can be conceptualised using linguistic structures. To the degree that non-linguistic knowledge utilises structures that are easily mapped into language, a higher clarity of description might be expected from the translation process. This in no way debunks our ability to describe culture and objects with language, but it does act to question its limits.²⁰

Objects as Interfaces to Knowledge

There is certainly a level of immersive knowledge that is not linguistically explicit gained through the process of ‘doing’ culture rather than observing or discussing culture. Ingold (2000) suggests that the process of making, in the case of his study of basket weaving, achieves a union of body know-how (practice) and substance (material) interaction that can produce form without a pre-conceived mental representation of the finished form.²¹ This reiterates potential difficulties for understanding art as a cultural artefact and also acknowledges the difficulties of relying on descriptive rationales of cultural actions. If we cannot accept explicit representations about the meaning of art by the artist, and the process of making is inaccessible, as with for instance an intuitive based method of making, then is all that is left is an immediate experience of the artwork itself?

The distinctions between linguistic knowledge and practical knowledge seem clear when applied to an example of riding a bicycle. The knowledge required to describe how to ride a bicycle operates linguistically, while practical knowledge only exists through physical engagement and attuning one’s body to the act of riding.²² I would also argue that the practical knowledge of riding could not exist without the bicycle. While the bicycle does not contain the knowledge of how to ride it, the object acts as a means to interface with that knowledge, a form of hybridity. Latour (1999) refers to hybridity as the relational state between people and objects; the inseparability of the “social” from the “technical”.²³ Latour’s argument places the relationship of people and things in such proximity

19. Maurice Bloch, “What goes without saying: The conceptualization of Zafiminy society,” in *Conceptualizing Society*, ed. A. Kuper (London: Routledge, 1992), 132.

20. Bloch’s arguments are largely based upon cognitive models of thought and knowledge acquisition; see also ———, “Language, Anthropology and Cognitive Science,” *Man* 26, no. 2 (1991); ———, “Questions not to ask of Malagasy carvings,”; Boivin, *Material cultures, material minds*: 85-91; I. Hodder, *Theory and Practice in Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 1992); ———, “Social Cognition” in C. Renfrew, C. Peebles, I. Hodder, B. Bender, K. Flannery, and J. Marcus, “Viewpoint: What is Cognitive Archaeology?,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 3, no. 2 (1993); ———, *The Archaeological Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999). Cf. Knappett, *Thinking through material culture*: 86.

21. Tim Ingold, *The perception of the environment: essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill* (Routledge, 2000), 339-48.

22. Knappett, *Thinking through material culture*: 5.

23. Latour (1999) uses the example of a gun on this point. A gun is nothing without someone to pull the trigger. The gun and the person wielding the gun become a new, hybrid social actor. B. Latour, *Pandora’s hope: essays on the reality of science studies* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 176-77.

as to make them joint social actors, “enfolding...the human and the nonhuman.”²⁴ Again, practice seems to focus on the utilitarian object where the knowledge implied through habitual action might seem obvious. In the case of the fetish one might imply a cultural or personal utility to define the parameters of use to better understand its hybridity. As I will discuss further with regard to agency, deciphering the hybridity of an artwork poses a greater challenge.

Critical questions arise regarding the location of agency and personhood if we cannot consider ourselves separate from objects. Bodily meaning established through practice and the world of objects complicates the Cartesian dualities of subject/object. The personification of matter is an innate trait of the fetish. The agency of things is becoming a serious academic concern within the field of material culture.(eg Appadurai, 1986; Boivin, 2008; Boyer, 1996; Brown, 2001; Knappett, 2005, 2008; Miller, 1987, 2005; Tilley, 2006. 2007; Gell, 1998)²⁵ The agency of things, or the personification of the inanimate, relates to imbuing things with body-like presence, an issue fundamental to the fetish, but a characteristic almost universal in human practice. The processes of abjection and liminality present in the fetish act to confuse the boundaries between the body and the material world. As a result, these processes also imbue objects with body-like qualities, affecting their sense of animacy.

2.2 Animating the Material

The nature of fetish objects is to be perceived as personified entities, objects become animate. In this section I will address three points: firstly, how objects become perceived as animate; secondly, the theoretical distinction between objects being ascribed with agency (as social actors) and objects being perceived as animate; and lastly, how body metaphors establish that perception of animacy. The animacy of things develops the concepts established at the beginning of this chapter regarding meaning generated through the body. Meaning and knowledge established through the body often occur in relation to the objects associated with that knowledge, a form of hybridity. As such, objects appear to inherit or possess animate qualities, what might be considered a form of agency. Agency is typically credited to conscious, intentional beings, so its considered application to objects would seem counter-intuitive at the least. Perhaps more accurately, the label of agency is reconsidered where objects themselves seem to have profound influence over people. Ascribing body-like qualities to objects through the process of metaphor creates a sense of animacy in the inanimate. This idea will lead into the final section of the Chapter discussing specific body associations exploited by the fetish through the processes of sympathy and contagion.

24. Knappett, *Thinking through material culture*: 30.

25. For example see: Arjun Appadurai, ed. *The Social life of things : commodities in cultural perspective* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1986); Boivin, *Material cultures, material minds*; Pascal Boyer, “What Makes Anthropomorphism Natural: Intuitive Ontology and Cultural Representations,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, no. 1 (1996); Brown, “Thing Theory.”; V. Buchli, ed. *The material culture reader* (Berg, 2002); Gell, *Art and agency*; Knappett, *Thinking through material culture*; Knappett and Malafouris, *Material Agency: Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach*; Daniel Miller, “Introduction,” in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham, N.C. : Duke University Press, 2005); Christopher Tilley, “Materiality in materials,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 14, no. 01 (2007); Tilley and et al, *Handbook of material culture*.

Perceptions of Animate Objects

The fundamental problem of the fetish relates to a broader struggle within the Western sciences, the construction and categorisation of the rational from the irrational. The irrational, the magical and the primitive have defined fetish discourse. The fetish operates as an animate ‘thing’; an object that becomes subject. This ‘magical’ disposition has been characterised as a misrecognition of the true nature of objects.²⁶ Instead, I would argue that separating the self from objects operates as a misrecognition. The fetish operates as an extreme case of our relationship to the material world, an exemplar of our bodily connection to objects. The fetish shares a bond with the bodies of its adherents; a bond that operates to imbue the fetish with animate properties. Perceptions of the animacy of things questions the very nature of subject/object discourse. Pietz (1988) contextualises the personality problems of the fetish:

Personification is the attribution of purpose and intentionality to natural objects proper to the order of mechanical or contingent causality, along with anthropomorphism as implying personification of impersonal material entities, thus becomes the characteristic mental operation of the superstitious mind cut off from that rational enlightenment provided by a scientific view of causality in the natural world...It lies at the core of the idea of fetishism and provides a key, I would suggest, to showing a common conceptual ground among such diverse theorists as Kant and Tylor: the notions of purposiveness and of animism derive from the same problematic that engaged both thinkers in their writings about the problem of fetishism.²⁷

I follow Pietz’s supposition regarding the nature of the fetish and its relationship to the animated and purposive object. When someone asks, “Is it wrong for me to love my shoes?” the question acknowledges the expected social condition of the impersonality of things, and thus the perversion of loving an object. At the same time, the everyday personification of objects is a vernacular whose subconscious response is: “No, the shoes will love me even more.” I agree with Latour when he states that we operate as hybrids with objects to generate new positions from which to reconsider the location of agency. The perceived separation of modern Western society, from a ‘primitive’ worldview, maintains the illusion that the status of the civilised is not to partake in *animism*, a condition we partake in everyday.²⁸

The concept of animism is closely aligned with the idea of the fetish. The term ‘animism’ originally derives from Tylor’s work *Primitive culture: researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art and custom* (1871).²⁹ The distinction between fetishism and animism relates to how

26. The term misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) draws upon Marx’s *Capital* (1867) to refer to a form of ‘false consciousness’. Swartz (1997) argues that for Bourdieu, the term refers to a “denial” of the economic and political interests present in a set of practices”. Bourdieu, reiterates this within with theories of social practice, expressing it as a denial of ‘symbolic labor’. Freud would characterise such a process as psychic denial towards the true nature of a fetishist’s object of devotion. D. Swartz, *Culture & power: the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), 89.

27. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part III,” 122.

28. For a development of Latour’s work, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), see Alf Hornborg, “Animism, fetishism, and objectivism as strategies for knowing (or not knowing) the world,” *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 71, no. 1 (2006).

29. Tylor, *Primitive culture*.

materiality and power are characterised—a difference that lies in the fetish’s *untranscended materiality*. Practically speaking these two categories may be difficult to distinguish, as Tylor explains:

Thus other spiritual beings, roaming free about the world, find fetish-objects to act through, to embody themselves in, to present them visibly to their votaries. It is extremely difficult to draw a distinct line of separation between the two prevailing sets of ideas relating to spiritual action through what we call inanimate objects. Theoretically we can distinguish the notion of the object acting as it were by the will and force of its own proper soul or spirit, from the notion of some foreign spirit entering its substance or acting on it from without, and so using it as a body or instrument. But in practice these conceptions blend almost inextricably.³⁰

Pels (1998) characterises the animist as perceiving the material world as animated by a “Spiritual Being...a spirit made to reside in matter. Animism, as applied to things, transcends their materiality by saying that the perception of the life of matter is only possible through an attribution of a derivative agency.”³¹ Further, these relations between subject and object, human and fetish, are reversible:

It [the fetish] points to an aesthetic sensibility in which the direction of mutual influence of human subject and thinglike object can be reversed; in which we cannot only think animistically, of anthropomorphized objects, of a spirit in matter, but also fetishistically, of human beings objectified by the spirit of the matters they encounter.³²

This characterisation of humans as the fetishes of the objects they fetishise provokes an extreme example of the inseparability and interchangeability of the two. This lack of separation acts to threaten our physical perceptions of the boundaries of the body. The devotional quality one shares with a fetish ensnares the body and incorporates it, becoming part of the body and the body part of it.

Despite the definitional complexity of separating the anthropological categories of *fetishism* and *animism*, the tendency to animate or personify material is a trait shared by both terms. Bird-David (1999) distinguishes fetishism and animism through the processes of their personification.

Fetishism... involves constructing concepts and relations as things, then (with anthropomorphism) attributing human qualities to them, then engaging with them as with persons. Animism... involves responsively engaging with beings/things, then perceiving them as persons.³³

This characterisation of fetishism recognises that material objects come to possess the qualities of animate beings, but firstly the object must incorporate a concept or relation. This incorporation

30. ———, *Primitive culture*, 2: 153.

31. Pels, “The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy,” 94.

32. *Ibid.*, 101.

33. Nurit Bird-David et al., ““Animism” Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology [and Comments and Reply],” *Current Anthropology* 40(1999): 89.

is the act of reification, making concrete the abstract. The process of attributing human qualities to objects occurs through the ascription of body metaphors, namely body metaphors relating to abjection and liminality.

Material Agency or Perceptions of Animacy?

I have shown that the body generates its own meaning through practice and objects, establishing a form of hybridity of knowledge between people and things. The fetish acts to conflate abstract concepts into material objects making those concepts tangible, a process of reification. By manifesting such abstract concepts as desire or justice, into material objects, it gives control and utility over those concepts. By imbuing the token fetish object with godlike or magical influence it conveys to the broker of that object a proxy divinity, the power to 'hold' such abstractions tangibly.³⁴ The act of substituting a leather shoe or piece of lace for the disavowal of the mother's penis enables the fetishist to take control of his desires physically. Appealing to the *nikisi* for arbitration manifests an interface with the abstract concepts of justice and retribution.

This relationship between fetish object and fetish practitioner would seem to bind the two, one not being able to fully maintain its power without the other. Gell (1992, 1998) characterises this process of magical binding as a form of enchantment. In the case of the art object, the artist is said to imbue a form of technical enchantment through the process of manifesting art. This in itself shares commonalities with the inception of the fetish, a moment of 'enchantment' that occludes and misrepresents the value of an object. Art objects continue to 'act' in the world, becoming 'social agents', a physical and objective manifestation of "the power or capacity to will their use".³⁵ While Latour establishes objects as social actors through the networks of relations they share, Gell characterises objects as having derivative agency produced by the intentions of their makers. The traditional idea of agency makes it difficult to attribute to 'things' a conscious, intentional and reflective act. With regard to the fetish, people acknowledge and give themselves over to its power. These fetish objects are personified and treated as having a personal and social presence—an ability to influence the lives of those that adhere to their power.

Gell attempts to relocate an anthropological theory of art within an encompassing theory of the agency of material objects, denying that the category of 'aesthetics' has any use for a discussion of cross-cultural art.³⁶ However, Morphy (2009, 2010) disagrees with an approach focusing solely on agency, critiquing the confusion between perceptions of animacy and a theory of animacy.

Seeing objects as agents—as persons—collapses theory and ethnography in a way that diverts anthropology from its analytic task. Social relationships are an important focus of anthropological analysis, though I would not quite give them the central role that Gell does. All material objects are entangled in social processes and, clearly they often do mediate relationships between people and domains of existence, for example the earthly and the spiritual. And material culture objects

34. Ellen, "Fetishism," 288.

35. Gell, *Art and agency*: 16-19.

36. Ibid., 2-3.

can be *believed* to be animate and can be endowed with the attributes of persons and responded to as if they were persons—though it needs to be established in particular cases that this is so. But the analyst who elides the difference between the social relations entailed in the use of objects and the observed belief that some objects are animate, by endowing the objects themselves with agency, cuts too many corners. The agnosticism, the suspension of belief that the anthropologist is required to espouse, is in practice very different from that suggested by Gell. It is necessary to get to see the images in the context of the viewing society and to enter the minds of the makers as much as possible, an exercise that requires an exploration of the cognitive and expressive dimensions of objects, answering the question of how they are seen and how they mean. It is vital that anthropologists acknowledge that certain material culture objects are *thought* to have agency and are *believed* to affect the world.³⁷

Here Morphy's critique would also seem to address Latour's arguments regarding the social relations between objects and persons. Rather than dismissing outright Gell and Latour, Morphy recognises the need to contextualise the belief and meaning attached to objects. His comments regarding the agnosticism of the anthropologist relate to Gell's (1992) assertion that anthropologists should exercise 'methodological philistinism' when conducting ethnographic fieldwork, being resolute to exercise an unwavering aesthetic agnosticism in the assessment of the 'art' of other cultures.³⁸ Morphy argues counter to Gell's aesthetic indifference, instead placing the ethnographer in an aesthetic empathy, attempting to understand the affect of an artwork from the indigenous point of view, incorporating an understanding of the meaning and iconography associated with an artwork, but also the affective, embodied and cognitive beliefs that shape perceptions, attitudes and emotions.³⁹ Morphy suggests that rather than rejecting Western aesthetics, there should be a separation from their Kantian allegiance with beauty, and instead incorporate the context in which objects are produced and consumed.⁴⁰

The tendency to animate the inanimate is a widely documented and debated area of human behaviour. These debates vary considerably from the biological sciences, to cognitive and social sciences. Seen largely as an 'irrational' state of mind, these tendencies are theorised alongside theories attempting to explain the ubiquity of religious and superstitious attitudes. Biological evolutionist arguments describe religious or superstitious sentiments as a necessary aspect of the

37. Morphy, "Art as Action, Art as Evidence," 279.

38. Gell, "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology," 42.

39. The term indigenous (small 'i') as opposed to Indigenous (capital 'I') indicates cross-cultural relativism rather than the identification of a particular cultural grouping. The degrees of this relativism are open ended and in the case of aesthetic and art, can sift down to the minutiae of subjectivities, as I will argue in Chapter 3.

40. Morphy, "Art as Action, Art as Evidence," 269. For a cross-cultural contextualisation of aesthetics, see the essays in Coote and Shelton, *Anthropology, art, and aesthetics*. For a critique of Gell's concept of agency as *abduction* of the artist's own agency, see: James Leach, "Differentiation and Encompassment: A critique of Alfred Gell's theory of the abduction of creativity," in *Thinking through things : theorising artefacts in ethnographic perspective*, ed. Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York : Routledge, 2007).

evolved brain.⁴¹ Cognitive science acknowledges the ‘counter-intuitive’ nature of religious thought as being significant for its emotive and mnemonic currency.⁴² While these models recognise the universal tendency to anthropomorphise the inanimate, biological and cognitive mapping is still filtered through a social lens and so its variety is complex and relational.⁴³ The cultural specificity of how and what is animated, becomes reflected in the body metaphors applied within a cultural group of shared meaning. I will examine how this sense of animacy is created through the realm of mapping body metaphor to objects.

Body Metaphors and Animate Objects

I have shown that embodied cognition and metaphor operate through the body to help form and concretise abstract thought.⁴⁴ Ideas such as distance establish a metaphoric relationship to goals and journeys, and weight associates with the gravity of a concept. The mapping of these sorts of metaphors onto objects, such as the fetish, creates a perception of anthropomorphism or lifelike quality. Malafouris (2007) focuses on this phenomena of anthropomorphism as a form of metaphoric mapping.

I suggest that anthropomorphism should be understood as a metaphoric projection. A metaphoric projection is essentially the conceptual mapping between a familiar or concrete and an unfamiliar or abstract, phenomenal domain. Obviously the crucial function of metaphoric mappings is to project—and not represent—the structure (spatial, perceptual or other) of a concrete and directly meaningful domain of experience (e.g. the embodied experience of weight) upon a meaningless abstract conceptual one (e.g. the concept of weight). Given that the human bodily experience offers the most intimate source of pre-conceptual structure, it follows that the human body will serve as the most basic source domain for such metaphoric conceptual mappings.⁴⁵

What is argued here is that our body acts as a template or matrix through which abstract concepts, such as religious thought or superstition, might be mapped onto the world through the process of metaphor. As I will show below, this is a rephrasing of some of Douglas’ (1969) ideas on purity and

41. For example see Justin L. Barrett, “Exploring the natural foundations of religion,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2000); ———, “Dumb Gods, Petitionary Prayer and the Cognitive Science of Religion,” in *Current approaches in the cognitive science of religion*, ed. Ilkka Pyysiäinen and Veikko Anttonen (New York, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002); Pascal Boyer, *The naturalness of religious ideas : a cognitive theory of religion* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1994); ———, “What Makes Anthropomorphism Natural: Intuitive Ontology and Cultural Representations.”; ———, “Why Do Gods and Spirits Matter at All?,” in *Current approaches in the cognitive science of religion*, ed. Ilkka Pyysiäinen; Veikko Anttonen (New York, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002); ———, “Religious thought and behaviour as by-products of brain function,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2003); Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the clouds : a new theory of religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

42. Boyer, “What Makes Anthropomorphism Natural: Intuitive Ontology and Cultural Representations.”

43. Bird-David et al., “‘Animism’ Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology [and Comments and Reply],” 69.

44. Here I am reiterating the work of Johnson and Lakoff on ‘Embodied Cognition and Metaphor Theory’: Mark Johnson, *The body in the mind*, the bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1987); ———, *The meaning of the body*; Johnson and Lakoff, *Metaphors we live by*; George Lakoff, *Women, fire, and dangerous things : what categories reveal about the mind* (Chicago : University Of Chicago Press, 1987); Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the flesh : the embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought*.

45. L. Malafouris, “The Sacred Engagement: Outline of a hypothesis about the origin of human ‘religious intelligence’.” in *Context, Reconsidering Ritual in Archaeology*, ed. D.A.; Malone C. Barrowclough (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007), 202.

danger and the use of the body as a system through which the abstract is mapped onto the concrete world or ritual and materiality. As an example, returning again to the Congolese nail fetish, the process of making Nkondi involves the driving of nails into the figure. This is a corporeal way in which abstract concepts of justice and social contractual obligation are manifested, through a literal inscription upon the body of the supernatural overseer. This then acts as a literal form of ‘binding’, of physical contract between the supernatural overseer and the aggrieved.

While the incorporation of body metaphors occurs to create a sense of power within fetish objects, arguably much of the meaning of these metaphors is generated through pre-conceptual forms of knowledge, through forms of mental images or ‘image schemata’. Johnson (1987) explains how the concept operates:

A schema consists of a small number of parts and relations, by virtue of which it can structure indefinitely many perceptions, images and events. In sum, the image-schemata operate at a level of mental organization that falls between abstract propositional structures, on the one side, and particular concrete images, on the other... [I]n order for us to have meaningful, connected experiences that we can comprehend and reason about, there must be pattern and order to our actions, perceptions and conceptions. *A schemata is a recurring pattern, shape and regularity in, or of, these ongoing activities ... I conceive of them [image-schemata] as structures for organizing our experience and comprehension.*⁴⁶

In the case of the fetish, the organising properties of these image schemes operate through powerful body metaphors. As I will show below, concepts of purity, danger, containment and pollution, are all ordered through our experience of the body. Metaphors of the body contained in objects often operate through schemes of transfer between sensory and embodied understanding of the world into affective states. Transferring or mapping perceptions and conceptions onto things operates to reify or concretise intangible properties into material form.

Mapping of the body animates whatever it metaphorically touches. The perceptual and abstract meanings generated through this form of mapping cannot exist without the object or the body. As we have seen from concepts of hybridity, the location of meaning is not solely in the object or the body but exists as a form of mediation, an interface between the two. Malafouris (2007) argues that material culture is necessary in the manifestation of religious and superstitious concepts—the metaphysical:

...cognitive projections like those we see realised in and through material culture are neither substitutes nor translations of pre-existing concepts into matter. The iconicity of the image does not simply reflect visual resemblances but rather establishes ontological ones; it is significant for what it does rather than what it

46. Johnson, *The body in the mind*: 29. Lakoff (1987) argues that specific metaphors are an application of more generic forms of meaning generated below the conscious surface, derived from pre-conceptual kinesthetic image schemes and basic level categories. The application of culturally specific metaphoric projections occurs from these two base level schemes of ordering the world. Lakoff, *Women, fire, and dangerous things: what categories reveal about the mind*: 267-68, 72-76. See also Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual theory, ritual practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 157-58.

refers to as a message or metaphor...⁴⁷

Here we are getting closer to what might be understood as the relationship of the fetish object and its relationship to the body schema. The fetish becomes a locus for the physical realisation of a more abstract realm, one that would otherwise be impossible to conceptualise without it taking a material form. This is an important argument and reiterates the subject/object collapse within the fetish object and the reification of the abstract into the concrete material world. While the fetish object may utilise strategies of representation, the object itself is a realisation of a metaphysical concept impossible to express without a physical form. I will develop this argument further in Chapter 3 and its relationship to fetish power in the art object.

While the body acts to map meaning onto things, the body also inherits meaning in its interactions with things. The current study considers the mapping of specific body metaphors, those used to establish fetish power. The body metaphors considered are those relating to the history of the fetish, namely its Occidental precedent, and the appropriation of the aesthetic themes of the erotic, exotic and profane. This history has coloured the application of the term fetish, blackened it, creating a negative discourse and abject bodily associations. The incorporation of specific aesthetics into the matrix of fetish materialisation also creates the reification of concepts such as the profane, the abject and the liminal. The incorporation of these specific body metaphors into the usage of the term fetish creates a style of animacy that establishes power through perceptions of sensuous threat and danger. Something I will now consider by exploring the magical principles of sympathy and contagion.

2.3 Mimesis of the Body: Sympathy and Contagion

I have established that knowledge can be derived directly from the body using metaphor and practice. This knowledge can enmesh bodies and objects, confusing their separation. The fetish is an extreme case of this confusion which arises from the particular body metaphors it incorporates, metaphors that relate to the abject and liminal. In this section I will develop these specific body metaphors tracing their relationship to the conception of sympathetic magic. I will firstly explain how the laws of magic relate to the theoretical concerns of mimesis and metonymy and concerns of representational likeness. Secondly I will explain how fetish power derives from body metaphors relating to purity and danger. The understanding of purity and its counter, dirt, form the basis for abjection. Lastly I will discuss liminality and conceptions of fluidity and entanglement. The final part of the chapter will address the material concerns for establishing fetish power. How this power is established materially will lead into a concrete understanding of how artists exploit that materiality in the realisation of their art, which will be the concern in Chapter 3.

47. Malafouris, "The Sacred Engagement: Outline of a hypothesis about the origin of human 'religious intelligence'." 206. Cf. Boyer, "What Makes Anthropomorphism Natural: Intuitive Ontology and Cultural Representations."; S. J. Mithen, "The Supernatural Beings of Prehistory and The External Storage of Religious Ideas.," in *Cognition and Material Culture: the Archaeology of Symbolic Storage.*, ed. C. Renfrew; C. Scarre (Cambridge: The McDonald Institute Monographs, 1998).

The Laws of Magic, Mimesis and Metonymy

The concepts of contagion (Tylor 1871; Frazer 1925), pollution (Douglas 1969), and abjection (Kristeva 1982), all have a basis in an embodied affect. Sensibilities derived from pre-cognitive learning through the experience of the body. The aesthetics of the fetish exploit these bodily affects to gain power. Body metaphor operates powerfully to *infect* objects with these affects, a form of magical transference from body to object and vice versa. The conception of this form of magic originates from EB Tylor (1871), known as ‘sympathetic magic’.⁴⁸ Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1925), picks up Tylor’s use of sympathetic magic and develops it further into a system of similarity and contact. In Frazer’s terminology, sympathetic magic is a homeopathic effect, where a like effect produces another like effect.

If we analyse the principles of thought on which magic is based, they will probably be found to resolve themselves into two: first, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and, second, that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed. The former principle may be called the Law of Similarity, the latter the Law of Contact or Contagion. From the first of these principles, namely the Law of Similarity, the magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it: from the second he infers that whatever he does to a material object will affect equally the person with whom the object was once in contact, whether it formed part of his body or not. Charms based on the Law of Similarity may be called Homoeopathic or Imitative Magic.⁴⁹

The examples of these forms of magic are common within popular culture, perhaps without knowledge of their origin or even intended effects. To ‘touch wood’ is a form of apotropaic magic (to ward off evil) derived from folk superstitions into the continued animacy or spirit of natural materials.⁵⁰ Thus to touch the wood transfers good luck from the original spirit of the wood to oneself through the logic of contagion. Traditional ancestor cults in New Caledonia use found stones of magnesium oxide as charms to produce rainfall. The stones are chosen for their appearance as a cloud heavy with rain, thus creating a sympathetic connection to the desired effect, the image of the thing itself.⁵¹ (Figure 10)

The power of the fetish derives from a connection to the body by incorporating abject and liminal states. While this connection may be formed through a representational image of the body, as in the nail fetishes of the Kongo or the wax dolls of Mbayá of Brazil (Figure 11), there are also many cases of objects that bear no resemblance to a person or body. The question then arises as to what level of sympathetic connection warrants the magical effects of similarity or contact to be exploited? The idea of sympathy or mimesis, at first thought might indicate a requirement

48. For example see: Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive culture*, 2 vols., vol. 1, researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art and custom. (London: 6th ed., J.Murray, 1871 [1920]), 117, 19, & 30.

49. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* [abridged ed.], 1: 14.

50. T. F. Thiselton Dyer, *The Folk-lore of Plants* (Gutenberg.com: Release Date November 18, 2003 [EBook #10118], 1889), unpaginated.

51. Alban Bensa and Guigone Camus, “Magic Stone,” in *Musée Du Quai Branly: The Collection: Art From Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas* ed. Yves Le Fur (Paris: Flammarion, 2009), 262.

of verisimilitude, a relationship of representational accuracy. But Taussig (1993) observes that in the realm of magic, mimesis is not concerned with accurate likeness, nor is it the pre-occupation of the magician or sorcerer.⁵² On this point Mauss and Hubert (1972) also note that sympathetic magic lacks any sense of mimetic realism, “[t]he image, the doll or the drawing is a very schematic representation, a poorly executed ideogram. Any resemblance is purely theoretical or abstract.”⁵³ This lack of representational clarity between the magical artefact and the actual model from which it is modeled, means that the mimetic relationship is far removed from visual resemblance or scientific renderings of cause and effect.

What then counts as a copy or replica of something to warrant this magical sympathetic effect? Likewise, what degree of contact is sufficient, or what constitutes contact at all to create a sense of



Figure 10. Houailou Valley, New Caledonia
Magic stone, Before 1910
Magnesium oxide concretion
Musée du quai Branly [Inv. 71.1930.30.23]

52. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*: 51.51.

53. Mauss and Hubert, *A General Theory of Magic*: 68.



Figure 11. Village of Nalike, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil
Dolls, Mid-Twentieth Century
 bone, wax, cotton
 6.5 x 4 x 3.5 cm; 7 x 4 x 3.5 cm
 Musée du quai Branly [Inv. 71.1936.48.401; Inv. 71.1936.48.402]

magical transference or contagion to take place? The perception of a mimetic or contagious magical effect can be likened to metaphor and metonymy respectively.⁵⁴ In the case of the fetish, the body acts as a matrix for the ordering of these forms of magical transference, the essence of the body becoming contained within the fetish artefact. As we have seen from Johnson and Lakoff's body metaphors connecting the sensuous knowledge of the body and the conceptual abstractions that result, the chain of logic can be long and mitigated by social and personal filters of understanding. Mauss and Hubert explain that the sympathetic chain of connection is rendered within the context of "...social conventions of classification and representation as well as mechanisms of... 'attention' and 'abstraction'."⁵⁵ So when Algerian women suspend a porcupine foot over their breasts to relieve pain from suckling children, the social and cultural rendering of the porcupine's power must be considered. (Figure 12) Is it the porcupine's ability to resist poison, or its bristling armour, that lend to its magical healing power? Only a small token, its foot, is required to harness its continuing sympathetic transfer to the body of its adherent.⁵⁶

A magical effect operates even where a smaller part of the body may act on behalf of the whole, like producing like, what Mauss and Hubert refer to this "similarity as contiguity" or *mimetic*



Figure 12. Algeria, Africa

Foot of a porcupine mounted in brass, used to prevent sore breasts, c. 1886

55 mm (length)

Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford [1886.1.425.1]

54. R. Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in *Language in literature*, ed. R. Jakobson, K. Pomorska, and S. Rudy (Belknap Press, 1987), 113.

55. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*: 52.

56. M. W. Hilton-Simpson, "Some Algerian Superstitions Noted among the Shawia Berbers of the Aurès Mountains and Their Nomad Neighbours," *Folklore* 26, no. 3 (1915): 248-49.

sympathy. A convention where the “image is to the object as the part is to the whole.”⁵⁷ This power of the synecdoche, in the case of the fetish, establishes parts of the body as standing in for the whole body. A lock of hair, a shoe, a rabbit’s foot, all establish a sympathetic connection to the body, but also stand in for the whole body. Ellis (2002) examines the superstitions surrounding objects such as a lucky rabbit’s foot, arguing that a number of African American forms of magic become conflated in the resulting fetish object. Aspects of “backward” elements incorporated into the lucky rabbit foot charm reinforce the “sinister” power it holds.

A body part from the rear of the animal and on the left...side implies an evil omen, reinforced if the person killing the rabbit was also left-handed. Persons with red hair and physical deformities such as crossed eyes and bowed legs were often thought to be unlucky or sinister...Bringing all of these unlucky elements together into a metonym of ritual murder marks the fetish as a powerful concrete representation of all these folk beliefs. Furthermore while other collected versions disagree about exactly when the rabbit must be killed, all indicate that the rabbit’s foot historicizes an especially uncanny or evil time: the dark of the moon, a Friday, a rainy Friday, a Friday the Thirteenth. Others specify that the rabbit must be shot with a silver bullet, the usual means of harming a supernatural being, such as a witch traveling in the form of an animal. Rabbits were, in fact, a common shape for an evil witch to take.⁵⁸

Ellis’ list of magical enactments necessary for the power of the rabbit’s foot to take hold, illustrates the sympathetic associations of “backward” elements. In this context, we might assume that the luck here derives from the negative aspects of its creation, an oppositional nature to magic, where “like drives out like in order to produce the opposite.”⁵⁹ (Figure 13)

If we return to Tylor’s (1871) original contention that a fetish can be any ‘thing’ at all, it appears that the social and personal determination of what constitutes sympathetic connections to desired outcomes can vary wildly.⁶⁰ The cross-cultural references to fetish and magical power serve to illustrate perhaps more familiar body metaphors of a ‘Western’ aesthetic, if I can be forgiven to conflate a sense of the body into a totalised thing for a moment. Given that the fetish is an Occidental conception, it is the particular abject qualities of our own Western bodies that have contributed to the formation of that conception. The power of the fetish is an intersection of the social and personal, so whatever totalising conceptions of the body might be applied, a personal, relational significance will always be necessary.

The suggestion that magical attitudes need be rational or instrumental has received re-evaluation over recent years with theories of cognition attempting to understand processes of thought and knowledge. Sørensen (2007) argues that magic and religion may operate ostensibly to achieve an instrumental role in answering human needs for explanation, control and manipulation. But magical and religious action differs from practical action, and that ritual actions are not based in

57. Mauss and Hubert, *A General Theory of Magic*: 68.

58. Bill Ellis, “Why Is a Luck Rabbit’s Foot Lucky? Body Parts as Fetishes,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 39, no. 1 (2002): 50.

59. Mauss and Hubert, *A General Theory of Magic*: 71.

60. Tylor, *Primitive culture*, 2: 144.



Figure 13. Oxfordshire, England
Rabbit's foot amulet attached to
advertising card, c. 1908
animal part, paper, pigment
Pitt Rivers Museum [1942.12.67]

explicit structures nor are they necessarily propositional in nature.⁶¹ This again reiterates Bourdieu's conception of ritual action, that it formulates its own non-propositional meaning, meaning that might be considered fluid and ambiguous.

The potency of fetish power derives from the ambiguity of the body metaphors it incorporates and relates back to a sense of misrecognition as to how it achieves its effects. So while the Freudian fetishist fixates his affections upon the shoe or stocking as a means of satisfying his urges, this is a misplaced understanding of the true unconscious motivations to disavow the mother's missing penis, substituting the fetish object in its place. Ambiguity and misrecognition operate through processes of sympathy, cognitive processes that realise meaning in tangible form through substitution and transference, mimesis and contagion, as Bean (2001) argues:

Mimesis stresses the reflexive, rather than reflection; it brings the subject into intimate contact with the object, or other, in a tactile, performative, and sensuous form of perception, the result of which is an experience that transcends the traditional subject-object dichotomy. Through mimesis the subject is not stabilized or rigidified by means of its identifications. Indeed, mimesis redefines identification as process, a contagious movement that renders indeterminate, fluid, or porous the boundaries between inside and outside.⁶²

It is this form of boundary collapse, that renders much of the fetish's power, by conflating itself within the boundaries of the body, assuming the role of organ and object simultaneously.

Purity and Danger

The conception of the bounded physical self has a profound effect upon our perceptions of

61. Jesper Sørensen, *A cognitive theory of magic* (AltaMira, 2007), 14.

62. Jennifer M. Bean, "Technologies of Early Stardom and the Extraordinary Body," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 16, no. 3 48 (2001): 46.

the contagious and polluting. In *Purity and Danger* (1966), Mary Douglas examines the concept of pollution and uncleanness, and the personal conception of the pure and profane. Douglas' work frames the concept of purity as a relationship to order and the body. This is a relational concept of difference; there is no absolute for the concept of 'dirt', only its relationship to order and therefore to the body.

Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment...Rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience. So far from being aberrations from the central project of religion, they are positive contributions to atonement.⁶³

Douglas characterises that which is polluting as "matter out of place".⁶⁴ The image-schemata of the body as a container, orders and systemises conceptions of the clean and unclean. Anywhere that a concept of dirt exists, so too does a system of meaning and symbolic order from which dirt distinguishes itself. Anything that transgresses the containment of the body represents a form of polluting influence, as matter out of place. Douglas' ideas are potent as they extend to personal conceptions of bodily threats and pollutions, something that incorporates the social and cultural, but also the psychic and unconscious.

The work of Douglas was used by Kristeva (1982) to formulate ideas of the abject. The relationship between the body and the unclean becomes a space where the boundaries of subject and object have not been established – something unclean, something that is rejected as filth, ejected from the body. The collapse of the interior into the exterior becomes apparent. According to Pietz (1995) the collapse of the subject/object distinction within the fetish is integral to a perception of its power and incorporation of the body of its adherent. For Kristeva, the power of abjection comes from its relationship to the archaic mind, a point before conception and language are formulated.⁶⁵ The relationship to the abject is unnamable, being formed without language, it necessitates a "hieroglyph having the logic of metaphor and hallucination" to take its place.⁶⁶ While this is framed from the psycho-analytic point of view, its characterisation is consistent with the theories of Johnson and Lakoff (1980) with regard to metaphor, cognition and embodiment outlined above. This state of being produced through an 'archaic' and sensuous relationship to the world recognises Douglas' placement of the body as a matrix for perceptions of threat and pollution. The perception and transgression of boundary states is established through one's own mapping of the body to the world. Abjection threatens these boundaries, at once incorporating and transgressing the threshold between self and other. Kristeva elaborates that "[i]t is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."⁶⁷ The fetish maintains this composite nature, defying any singular categorical assignment, by conflating personal and social significance into an object of disavowal and misrecognition.⁶⁸

63. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*: 2.

64. Ibid., 40.

65. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*: 56-89.

66. Ibid., 35.

67. Ibid., 4.

68. Kristeva argues that all language is a form of fetish, a disavowal and misrecognition of the true unnamable properties of the archaic mind. Ibid., 37.

Perhaps the clearest and simplest example of an abject state that Kristeva refers to is the skin of milk, “harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring.”⁶⁹ This state of food loathing creates an affective state of disgust, a state of horror. A sense of revulsion for something meant to be incorporated into the body through the mouth. The embodied states of abjection relate to transgressions of the body. For Kristeva, the orifices of the body present points of incorporation and rejection. Food loathing results in the abject states of visceral horror. Rejection of bodily waste, spit, vomit, urine, blood, results in a more corporeal horror, one relating to one’s own mortality. These wastes were once part of the body, only to become separated and rejected; the horror is revulsion of the self and the necessity of rejecting part of one’s own body.

Freud weighs into the discussion in the foreword of Bourke’s aptly titled, *Scatalogic Rites of All Nations* (1934), claiming that in childhood, we have no perception of filth, there is no disgust exhibited at our own excrement. Nor is there a distinction between the interest in excretions and sexual interests. Rather, “[u]nder the influence of education coprophilic [pleasure from faeces] tendencies and impulses of the child are gradually repressed; he learns to keep them secret, to feel ashamed of them and to feel disgust at them.”⁷⁰ Bourke’s extensive regard for the topic reinforces Freud’s assertion that the perception of filth and excrement is metred by its social and cultural filters.

McClintock (1995) distinguishes between several form of abjection, including fetishism:

With respect to abjection, distinctions can be made, for example, between abject *objects* (the clitoris, domestic dirt, menstrual blood) and abject *states* (bulimia, the masturbatory imagination, hysteria), which are not the same as abject *zones* (the Israeli Occupied Territories, prisons, battered women’s shelters). Socially appointed *agents* of abjection (soldiers, domestic workers, nurses) are not the same as socially abjected *groups* (prostitutes, Palestinians, lesbians). *Psychic* processes of abjection (fetishism, disavowal, the uncanny) are not the same as *political* processes of abjection (ethnic genocide, mass removals, prostitute ‘clean ups’).⁷¹ (original emphasis)

These are not discrete categorisations; there is much overlap and interrelation occurring between them. Defining fetishism as a psychic process of abjection does not discount abject objects being fetishes themselves. Fetish objects exhibiting abject traits incorporate material and psychic properties of fluidity and liminality, properties that reinforce perceptions of fetish power through ambiguity and bodily attachment. The perception of the fetish’s ambiguity arises from its maintenance of a state of oscillation between disavowal and incorporation, a state shared by abjection as Kristeva (1982) argues:

We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing

69. Ibid., 2.

70. Sigmund Freud in John Gregory Bourke, *Scatalogic rites of all nations*, : a dissertation upon the employment of excrementitious remedial agents in religion, therapeutics, divination, witchcraft, lovephilters, etc., in all parts of the globe; based upon original notes and personal observation, and upon compilation from over one thousand authorities (New York: N.Y., American Anthropological Society, 1934), viii-ix.

71. A. McClintock, *Imperial leather: race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial contest* (Routledge, 1995), 72.

a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. But also because abjection itself is a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives.⁷²

Conceptions of the boundary reflect, as Douglas and Kristeva argue, ordering concepts that relate directly to the body. Cognitively this is a powerful ordering methodology and defines a series of mental schemas operating through metaphors of containment.⁷³ Fundamental to the notion of a boundary, is its ability to distinguish the ‘other’ as Smith (2004) explains:

Setting aside ethological notions of animal territoriality, perhaps the most basic sense of the ‘other’ is generated by the opposition IN/OUT. That is to say, a preoccupation with boundary, with limit (in the primary sense of threshold) seems fundamental to our construction of ourselves and our relations to others.⁷⁴

Liminality, Fluidity and Entanglement

Fetishes incorporating abject body metaphors operate to blur perceptions of boundaries between objects and people—a state of liminality. In *The Rites of Passage* (1960), Van Gennep defines the importance of transitional states in the process of establishing boundaries within society.⁷⁵ Van Gennep defined three stages within the ritual processes of rites of passage that act to define its participants and enact transformation of their social roles. The liminal phase occurs after separation and before reintegration into the social group. Liminality is a “betwixt and between” phase where transformation occurs; however a state of liminality effectively maintains dissolution of identity. The term has been expanded beyond its ritual application, akin to a threshold state. For Van Gennep rituals of marriage and death represent liminal stages. The bride or the body of the deceased become transitional forms of social identity, a state of being not meant for continued existence. Boivin (2008) notes that ritual transformation is usually accompanied by physical migration, tying the action of passage to rites of passage.⁷⁶ The liminal as later defined by Turner (1969) is essentially ambiguous in nature, being likened to “death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and eclipse of the sun and the moon.”⁷⁷

This liminal state confuses interior and exterior states. It is clear from Douglas that the body acts as a matrix for ordering; Kristeva’s assertion is that it also destroys order. This double performance of the body, sanctifying and defiling, operates profoundly within fetish objects. Pietz observes of the African fetish:

It was not the spiritual state of the believer’s soul, but rather the physical state of

72. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*: 9-10.

73. Sørensen, *A cognitive theory of magic*: 41.

74. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating religion*, essays in the study of religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 230.

75. Van Gennep, *The rites of passage*

76. Boivin, *Material cultures, material minds*: 53-54.

77. V.W. Turner, *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure*, reprint (original 1969) ed. (Chicago: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995),

95. See also ———, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage,” in *The forest of symbols: aspects of Ndembu ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

his or her body that mediated the relation of the fetish-worshiper to divine power. Thus fetishes were external objects whose religious power consisted of their status almost as internal organs affecting the health and concrete life of the individual.⁷⁸ [T]he subjection of the human body (as the material locus of action and desire) to the influence of certain significant material objects that, although cut off from the human body, function as its controlling organs at certain moments.⁷⁹

Here there is a synecdochic extension and incorporation of the fetish into the body. The physicality and sensual relationship to a material object external to the body and yet assumed to be part of it, places the fetish in a liminal zone, an extended schemata of the body's physical boundaries. The body exists by extension, incorporating and mediating itself through the material world.

The liminal zones of the body proper become those spaces that exist to transgress the threshold, the orifices and pores. It is through these portals that bodily matter is transformed into ejecta and refuse, but also the point through which the boundary of the inside and outside of the body collapses. This marginal nature is perceived as a threat, but is transitional and migratory, not absolute. Applying this body metaphor to any perception of liminality creates a sense of danger and threat, as Douglas reinforces:

...all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of the fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spit, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. So also have bodily parings, skin, nail, hair clippings and sweat. The mistake is to treat bodily margins in isolation from all other margins.⁸⁰

This danger of margins and orifices translates as literal spaces within more figurative ethnographic objects. But the metaphorical space assigned to non-figurative forms operates simply through the logic of openings and penetration. Gell (1998) pays particular attention to the artefacts of idolatry and their ability to invoke projections of mind through semblances of inside/outside, especially iconic references to an interior through the use of 'orifices'. Such a strategy establishes an 'internal agency' whereby the idol is deemed to have an interior cavity, a place where the power of mind resides simply by providing mental access via the orifice. Gell argues this mind/body contrast is "primordially *spatial and concentric*; the mind is 'internal' enclosed, surrounded, by something (the body) that is non-mind."⁸¹ Whilst this formulation refers to the representational qualities of the idol, it provides formal and metaphoric qualities that make the material object resonate with personified qualities. Conversely, many of the Kongolese 'nail fetishes' have an orifice within the body, a place into which packets of magical ingredients are inserted to incorporate them into the 'body' of the object. But it is through the act of piercing the fetish with nails that invokes the fetish,

78. Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, part II," 44.

79. ———, "The Problem of the Fetish, part I," 10.

80. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*: 150.

81. Gell, *Art and agency*: 132-33.

angering it through a bodily transgression, the nail operates as a physical and visual marker of fetish intention as well as a liminal thorn in its side.

The qualities of liminality can be deemed dangerous if not reincorporated somehow. But they also have the power to be managed, to oscillate between pure and impure. The idea of the ‘impure sacred’, defined by Durkheim (1912), reveals that the pure and impure exist within the same genus of sacred things, one auspicious, the other inauspicious. The pure and impure can transition from one to the other without changing their nature, the pure can become impure and vice versa whilst still maintaining sacredness.⁸² Durkheim’s distinctions attempt to grasp a third categorical state, of liminality, a tension of opposites in oscillation. Derrida (1981) incorporates the terms *pharmakon* from ancient Greek philosophy, at once a cure and remedy, but also threat and poison.⁸³ Derrida derives the word as a *trace* from Plato’s writings, something incorporated from outside the text, implied by the textual chain of Plato’s lexicon.⁸⁴ Derrida challenges the binary distinction of inside/outside. While maintaining the *pharmakon* as only partially present in the text (in the exterior), its incorporation reiterates a conception of the trace, implied by the logic of the interior. The inside and outside become entwined and implicated within each other, presence implying absence.

Derrida uses the trace as a device for the deconstruction of the textual, but the concept of the *pharmakon* maintains a physical and corporeal association through its purification of the body and its threat to defeat it. So while the mimetic and sympathetic processes of magic require a connection between means and ends, Derrida provides a connection through absence. The trace of the body can be implied by mimetic logic whose negative space is filled by the body. This trace of the body, or spectral presence through absence, creates a different sense of the bodily connection, a phantom connection.

The fluidity of shifting thresholds and oscillating identities within the fetish, reiterates the power of ambiguity and its nature of subject/object collapse. Grosz (1994) argues that body fluids and viscosity carry social codings of sexual difference. While not discounting the personal corporeal response, Grosz attempts to decipher broader cultural features of how we demarcate identity, difference and sexuality within contemporary Western culture.⁸⁵ Within this scheme of fluids, there is a hierarchy, privileging the seminal, functional fluid over the defiling fluid of menstrual blood.⁸⁶ Underlying this hierarchy is what Irigaray (1985) calls the “mechanics of solids”. The fluid, as opposed to concrete, within Cartesian Western discourse, represents the uncertain, the irrational, the feminine, the bodily.⁸⁷ The connection of the aesthetic and conceptual here operates to order power relations and perceptions of social hierarchy. There is a profound intersection of social valuations of sex/gender and concrete material perceptions of fluidity and viscosity. Grosz argues it is women’s perceived ability to drain and absorb men that reiterates metaphors of feminine threat and contagion through insatiable and unknowable (invisible as opposed to phallic visibility) sexual power.⁸⁸

82. Emile Durkheim, *The elementary forms of the religious life* (New York: Collier Books, 1912 (1961)).

83. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone, 1981), 98-99.

84. Derrida establishes the concept of the *trace* in ———, *Of grammatology*, trans. G.C.Spivak (Johns Hopkins U.P, 1976); ———, *Writing and difference*, trans. A. Bass (University of Chicago Press, 1978).

85. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*: 197-98.

86. Ibid., 198-207. Kristeva and Grosz identify that not all bodily fluids operate to defile, tears being the most notable.

87. L. Irigaray, *This sex which is not one* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 113.

88. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*: 203.

The flow of the fluidic translates to our perceptions of viscosity or ‘tackiness’, a substance’s ability to adhere. Douglas’ considers Sartre’s use of the term ‘tackiness’ in *Being and Nothingness* (1943):

The viscous is a state half-way between solid and liquid. It is like a cross-section in a process of change. It is unstable, but it does not flow. It is soft, yielding and compressible. There is no gliding on its surface. Its stickiness is a trap, it clings like a leech; it attacks the boundary between myself and it. Long columns falling off my fingers suggest my own flowing into a pool of stickiness...to touch stickiness is to risk diluting myself into viscosity.⁸⁹

Compare the sensation of stickiness with the experience of smoothness. The sensation of dissonance that Sartre associates with tackiness, must compare with a feeling of completeness, as Douglas would suppose; pollution is matter out of place, and therefore the sacred is something that orders both categorically but also sensorially.

The conceptual and aesthetic forms of abjection and liminality translate into perceptual and sensorial fields of experience that give objects profound power. In the case of the fetish, these forms of power operate through forms of misrecognition and ambiguity, and inability to separate the perceived bodily self from the object realm. This conflation of self and other takes on particular psychic and material forms, forms that blur boundaries and operate to animate objects through the attachment of body metaphors. This process is a mediated one, between an individual and the object world. The incorporation of particular forms of body metaphors (abjection and liminality), fuel the power of the fetish. This sense of power is something that can be attributed to art objects through their exploitation of these same body metaphors.

In this Chapter I have shown that the material world forms a dialectic relationship with the human world, where meaning is established through subject/object hybridity and mediation. The meaning established and translated often occurs as knowledge formed without language, through processes of ritual and practice. The incorporation of body metaphors into objects establishes a sense of animacy in the otherwise inanimate world of things. It is through magical principles of similarity and contagion that fetish objects gain bodily and animate power. Sympathetic magic operates through processes of mimesis and metonymy, where the notion of bodily connection can be formless, ambiguous and sensorial rather than representational, literal and mental. The concepts of abjection and liminality feed the fetish providing an aesthetic framework that acts cognitively and sensorially to imbue power and significance onto objects. It is this latter point that I develop in Chapter 3, outlining how these fetishised properties continue to act within art objects. The aesthetic tropes of the fetish explored within the history of its making in Chapter 1, provide a framework from which contemporary artists build perceptions of power within their own art. The spectral trace of the body within art provokes animate powers, reification of abject and liminal sensibilities into concrete art objects harnesses an aesthetic power that counters notions of the sublime.

89. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*: 38. See also J. P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, an essay on phenomenological ontology (Routledge, 1969).

CHAPTER 3: MEDIATING THE IMMATERIAL

This chapter explores the connection between the themes of the fetish developed thus far and their relationship to Western contemporary art. Here I argue that fetishisation operates creatively to establish what Pietz (1985) characterises as untranscended materiality within the Western fine art object—the point at which an object becomes inseparable from abstract or immaterial conceptions. Contemporary fetish discourse (Pietz 1985, 1987, 1989, 2003, Graeber 2005, Spyer 1998, and Apter and Pietz 1993) establishes fetish objects as extreme examples for the case of material agency—objects performing as subjects. Like the fetish, the art object raises theoretical concerns with material agency and the degree to which material things can be separated from the concepts they are imbued with.

First I will consider the historical incorporation of fetish concepts and discourse into the Western art canon. The formal and sensuous qualities of African Fetishes, as introduced to Europe in the 17th century, operated as counterpoints in the formation of theories of aesthetics and the sublime by authors such as Burke (1756) and Kant (1776).⁹⁰ African fetish objects became associated with an aesthetic of abjection (contra sublime) and ugliness, eliciting responses of disgust and horror in Europeans of the time. Despite this historical prejudice, Pietz's (1985) theoretical framework, addressed in Chapter 1, suggests that the fetish exists as a positive and socially creative force (see also Graeber 2005). Considered as a creative enterprise, the fetish as art object emphasises the importance of a sensuous aesthetics rather than one of a detached contemplative gaze.

Secondly, I will discuss the fetish properties within art as necessarily sensuous, engaging the viewer as an embodied participant in an intimate engagement with an art object. This raises theoretical concerns regarding the nature of subject/object relations, the nature of materiality. Miller (1987) argues that materiality operates as a mediating point between the conscious and unconscious; the expression of materiality defines the immaterial (2005).⁹¹ Miller argues then that materiality can operate paradoxically to reinforce and explicate the immaterial, while others suggest that there may be no separation of a material object and the concepts they 'embody' (Henare, Holbraad, Wastell eds. 2007)⁹². This has particular ramifications for the consideration of objects cross-culturally, shifting the meaning of things from an epistemological framework of 'worldviews' to an ontological methodology—understanding that material objects *are* concepts as much as they appear as 'material' or 'physical entities'.⁹³ This tension between dualisms such as: subject/object; material/immaterial; and transcendent/untranscendent, epitomises the ongoing concerns raised by the concept of the fetish. Art objects, in a similar vein, have the potential to operate as unique material objects that reify the immaterial. However, as Henare, Holbraad and Wastell argue, if concepts cannot be considered separate from their material expression, the fetish and the art object might be seen to operate as an explicit case of a more general property of materiality and things. Adopting a methodology of ontological inquiry into objects requires an understanding of how things operate

90. Burke, *A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful*; Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*. (*Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime*).

91. Miller, *Material culture and mass consumption*: 99; ———, "Introduction," 28.

92. Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell, "Introduction: thinking through things."

93. *Ibid.*, 13.

heuristically—how things operate as modes of thought.¹ Things as heuristic devices creates an onus on not only understanding the context in which things operate, but also the subjective perception that works to create significance and meaning. An ethnography of things, especially fetishised things, creates a need to understand the ontology of subjects.

Finally, I will address the material dialectics of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin and their concept of ‘exact fantasy’ as a means to theorise the process by which objects become transformed through language and cognition by those that experience them. Benjamin and Adorno’s conception of exact fantasy places an emphasis on the creative process (fantasy) of the subjective translation of the object world around them. In this experiential state I would offer a shift in the way fetish power might be understood, as a site of experience and a means of establishing a sensory understanding of the immaterial, but also an explication of the importance of subjective ontologies when engaging with art.

In Chapter 1 I followed the history of the fetish as an object of Occidental construction. I outlined the relationships of the fetish to moral constructions of beauty and the aesthetic sublime, or more precisely the contra to the sublime, the primitive and unenlightened, the profane. Within the discourses of the social sciences and art history, the fetish then became synonymous with primitive witchcraft and constructions of delusional misplacement of value. In Chapter 2 I outlined the relationship between concepts of magic, animism and the body, specifically through notions of contagion and sympathy (mimesis). The power of the fetish derives from perceptions of pollution and contagion, specifically body metaphors aligned with abject and liminal states. These states incorporate intense ambiguity regarding a separation of self from the material world, a confusion of boundaries. This is a state of intense personal significance that often operates without consideration or rational response.

3.1 Incorporating the Fetish into Art

There are two related but important distinctions to make with regard to the fetish and its relationship to art. The first derives from a process of fetishisation that involves a transposition of value, resulting in misrecognition. The process of value conversion, from a mundane thing to an auric art object, occurs through the belief systems that support the enchanting power of the artist, the gallery and the art critic: a web of relationships that ascribe power to objects and their adherents. This model of analysis assesses art as a social and cultural effect. The second relationship of the fetish to the art object is related to the personal affect generated through the relationship of an object and an individual rather than a misrecognition of value; it is a genuine belief in the power of an object.

Misrecognition: The Fetishisation of Value

The fetish has been characterised in opposition to concepts of the aesthetic and the sublime since the 18th century and was considered a form of primitive sensuous attachment to objects,

1. Ibid., 5.

whereas engagement with art in its ritual space of contemplation, encouraged forms of detached consideration. Duncan (1995) argues that despite its secular intentions, the modern museum and art gallery operate as sites where the conceptual world of society at large is put on ritualistic display, reinforcing the individual's place in the past and present—the separation of the self from the object of inquiry aligned with an ordering philosophy of rationality and Cartesian thought.² In the history of Western art, this places the fetish object as somewhat displaced, typically being assigned to ethnographic and museological collections. The evaluation of Western art as a form of material culture leads to a necessary critique of its valuation within society. Considerations of art from a cross-cultural perspective create analogies between artists and technicians of the occult, both having the abilities to transform social value, a form of mystification and fetishisation. The association of the term fetish with historical renderings of the exotic, erotic, and uncivilised Other, has created concrete material imaginings through which these stereotypical ideas have been reified—a form of fetishising Otherness and alterity.

The incorporation of the fetish into Western art had an inauspicious beginning due to its aesthetic rejection by the philosophies of De Brosses (1760) and Kant (1776). However one of the resonating attributes of the fetish, that relating to the perception of elevated value, places the fetish centrally in reconsiderations of how art is valued and how that value is created. The question of value raises significant questions regarding the position of the theoretical gaze—whose evaluations are valued. In *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), Bourdieu renders all art a fetish with his analysis of 'taste' and the social valuation of art. Bourdieu's belief that art is something socially and institutionally constructed, its value (or over valuation) is a form of fetishisation, a misrecognition of its true nature.³ Bourdieu's assertion being that the veil of social taste transforms objects into art rather than being dull things. Pietz (1996) explains Bourdieu's mode of scientific thinking:

The scientific approach to understanding art as fetish is to analyze not only the processes producing the works themselves but also those producing the belief that there is such a thing as art at all.⁴

While I agree with Bourdieu's point that the processes of art valuation and the nature of belief are intrinsic to understanding the value placed upon art as a reified category within Western culture, this is no different from any form of material culture and the values ascribed to it. I agree that a *process* of fetishisation operates to create value and misrecognition, a fundamental consideration for the over-valuation of things and a process that Bourdieu seeks to explore in his theorisation of art. However as I will address below, the personal engagement and the affect that results from art objects is a subjective experience, while embodied meaning may be influenced by a socially and culturally defined sensory schema, Bourdieu's model leaves no room for the concept of the individual as an equally important factor in the construction of 'taste' and value.

Contrary to Bourdieu's valuation of art as a system of symbolic labour, Gell (1998) is keen to dispute any 'language of art' having cross-cultural relevance and chooses to avoid the association

2. Carol. Duncan, "The Museum as Ritual," in *Civilising Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (Routledge (reprinted in *The art of art history: a critical anthology*, edited by D. Preziosi: Oxford University Press, 2009.), 1995), 425.

3. Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of cultural production*, essays on art and literature (Cambridge [England] : Polity Press, 1993), 35-36, 258-60.

4. Pietz, "Fetish," 200.

of ‘symbolic meaning’ within an interpretation of art. Instead, Gell examines objects through the concepts of agency, intention, causation, result and transformation.

We talk about objects, using signs, but art objects are not, except in special cases, signs themselves, with ‘meanings’; and if they do have meanings, then they are part of language (i.e. graphic signs), not a separate ‘visual’ language.⁵ [Gell’s emphasis]

Gell attempts to understand art objects as manifestations and carriers of artists’ intentions, therefore being imbued with their own derivative agency. Gell’s reluctance to include any use of symbolic value attempts to build a cross-cultural account of what might constitute ‘art’, requiring an ‘aesthetic agnosticism’ of the ethnographer, that removes a Western conception of what looks and operates like art, and instead looks at things in terms of indexes of social intention, action and interrelation. While this aspect of Gell’s work has been criticized and debated (Miller 2005; Morphy 2009), Gell poses the question: is it possible to have a cross-cultural category of art at all?⁶ The process of value creation is something that defines the process of fetishisation and in a similar way establishes the power of art. Fine Art as a category presents a difficulty for the field of anthropology (e.g. Morphy 1976; Layton 1991) and challenges for the traditional Western art canon of Art History (e.g. Danto 1989).⁷ Morphy (2008) argues for an assessment of the value creation process that selects the finest examples of a tradition and displays these for privileged viewing in selected institutions.⁸

Morphy (1994), defines art objects cross-culturally as “ones with aesthetic and or semantic attributes (but in most cases both), that are used for representational or presentational purposes.”⁹ Morphy’s view of art encompasses an aesthetic (sensory/affective) and semantic (meaning) approach which considers the social context as crucial for a nuanced understanding of the diverse forms that art can take. Here I quote Morphy (2010) at length as he reiterates a position of cross-cultural aesthetics that counters Gell’s (1998) refusal on the matter.

Art is often deployed in social or religious contexts because it connects the cognitive and affective dimensions of human experience and facilitates complex ways of acting in the world. A work of art may encode meanings precisely, depicting an event, a sequence of action, a religious story, a particular person, or mythic being. Yet, the same work can also point towards ideas that cannot be so easily expressed, creating atmosphere, a sense of personality, or the state of a relationship. Art can ‘communicate’ through visual codes. The designs of distinctive forms of regalia that mark status, or the patterns that mark clan identity and more mundanely team membership. Visual properties can equally be used aesthetically to convey abstract concepts—time, space, atmosphere, chaos, order and so on—and colours can be used to convey emotions or, slipping again into the mundane, the

5. Gell, *Art and agency*: 6.

6. Miller, “Introduction.”; Howard Morphy, “Art as a Mode of Action,” *Journal of Material Culture* 14, no. 1 (2009).

7. Danto, “Artifact and Art.”; Robert Layton, *The anthropology of art*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1991).

8. Morphy, *Becoming art*: xii.

9. ———, “The Anthropology of Art,” in *Companion encyclopedia of anthropology* ed. Tim Ingold (London : Routledge, 1994).

appropriate ambience for a kitchen or bathroom. The cognitive and affective, and the semantic and aesthetic, while relatively autonomous, are in actuality co-present in the form of works of art. The stretching of meaning associated with artworks often happens because some things can be best expressed through aesthetic forms. Such ideas may be expressed through material forms that have a powerful impact on the human body, which create sensations that are almost inescapable—the sensation of the body being filled with light or becoming overwhelmingly heavy. The relationship between physical stimulus and bodily sensation is something all humans experience and art is in part the use of this shared experience to create meaning and to share emotions. In Yolngu art, the brilliance of the design is the ancestral power that is the vital force behind the world. However, similar effects in the context of other societies, while having some synergies, may have quite different significance and be stretching towards very different ideas. The particularities of the meaning of form in context need to be understood before the metaphysics can be appreciated.¹⁰

The cross-cultural import of affective and sensory considerations of the meaning of objects extends far beyond a visualist interpretation of objects, but Morphy also acknowledges scheme transfer between sensory and cognitive forms of knowledge. Morphy places the value of art at the intersection of aesthetic, semantic and personal contexts.

The social role of the artist is significant as an endorsed tradesman whose craft is the mystifying power to transform value. Bourdieu (1993) contextualises the artist's ability of transubstantiation as a collective conspiracy, a socialised willful blindness.

As Marcel Mauss observed, the problem with magic is not so much to know what are the specific properties of the magician, or even of the magical operations and representations, but rather to discover the bases of the collective belief or, more precisely, the collective misrecognition, collectively produced and maintained, which is the source of the power the magician appropriates. If it is 'impossible to understand magic without the magic group', this is because the magician's power, of which the miracle of the signature or personal trademark is merely an outstanding example, is a valid imposture, a legitimate abuse of power, collectively misrecognized and so recognized. The artist who puts her name on a ready-made article and produces an object whose market price is incommensurate with its cost of production is collectively mandated to perform a magic act which would be nothing without the whole tradition leading up to her gesture, and without the universe of celebrants and believers who give it meaning and value in terms of that tradition.¹¹

According to Bourdieu the cultural and historical distinctions of taste and value operate to fetishise the art object, something whose value is rarefied and elevated beyond the mundane. The presentational quality of what can be art is framed by its museological and institutional context,

10. ———, "Art as Action, Art as Evidence," 288-89.

11. Bourdieu, *The field of cultural production*: 81.

but also by the definition of the artist as cultural magician.¹² Bourdieu refers to artists as socially acknowledged magicians, warranted with the task of transforming value. Gell (1992) discusses art making as a form of technology, which he characterises as a form of enchantment, the artists' sanctioned abilities operate to transform value using technical mastery.

As a technical system, art is orientated towards the production of the social consequences which ensue from the production of these objects. The power of art objects stems from the technical processes they objectively embody: the *technology of enchantment* is founded on the *enchantment of technology*. The enchantment of technology is the power that technical processes have of casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form. Art as a separate kind of technical activity, only carries further through a kind of involution, the enchantment which is immanent in all kinds of technical activity.¹³

Gell is referring to the artist as "occult technician", claiming that where someone professes a form of knowledge in society that is undisclosed to the general populous, that knowledge, and the bearer of that knowledge, take on a form of mystic power. In the case of the artist, a performative knowledge is held through their ability to manifest the material art object with creative labour. This awe of technical efficacy is culturally relative, as Gell points out, but it is essential that a perception of transformation be induced by the actions of the artist.¹⁴ This form of captivation by the artist's virtuosity only occurs for the viewer if there is an understanding of the process by which it was born, that is, through the fruits of the artist's labour. However Gell acknowledges that objects may captivate on their own grounds, as they are, without the perception of the artist's agency being imbued within the object.¹⁵ The artist might then remain as a 'trace' within the art object; it is ultimately the object that presents itself. The social role of the artist, endorsed and legitimised by the institutional structures of Western art history, adds context for the valuation of the art object, and what might be considered art proper, but the tastes of the individual and their relationship and personal affectation to an artwork may vary significantly. While I have outlined states of body abjection as being fundamental to the experience of fetish power, I have referenced a totalised body, distinguishing sex only.¹⁶ The degree to which relative difference is accommodated by social and cultural theories has always been a challenge and the consideration given to subjective points of view challenges the foundation of grand narrative discourse.

While the performative and social role of the artist might be sanctioned to heighten the perceived value of objects, the imposition of an artist's intention upon the material world is not an

12. For the conviction of this approach see: Danto, "Artifact and Art."; McEvelley, "ART/artifact: What Makes Something Art?." See also Duncan's consideration of the museum as a secular place for the ritualisation of art: Duncan, "The Museum as Ritual."

13. Gell, "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology," 44.

14. Ibid., 52.

15. ———, *Art and agency*: 72. Gell consistently argues for the need to remove any consideration of aesthetics from what constitutes 'art' cross-culturally and yet here makes a concession that seemingly makes way for an aesthetic appreciation of objects. On this point Morphy (2009) criticizes Gell's own use of Western aesthetic frames of reference in his discussions of non-Western 'art-objects'. Morphy, "Art as a Mode of Action," 10.

16. Freud's concepts of perversion and fetishism have operated to maintain normative ideas of sexuality and gender identity. Foster (1996) critiques the incorporation of "anal erotics" into a heterosexual model of abjection, thus rendering 'anal play' abnormal. The heterosexist implications for abjection are plain here, but Foster also points out that one cannot reduce male homosexuality to anal eroticism. Hal Foster, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic," *October* 78(1996): 118-19.

unmediated process in itself. Gell (1992) argues that the process of transforming ‘nature’ through the ‘technology of enchantment’ occurs through a process of dialogue between artist and material. Ingold (2000) agrees that a dialogue exists between artist and material, but argues against the oppositional characterisation of nature and technology, critiquing the assumption that these two categories exist as easily separable and hierarchicised.¹⁷ His essay remarks specifically on the process of making a basket, which he argues does not occur as a process of representation in reverse, manifesting a thought as a material object. Instead Ingold refers to the maker’s hand and mind (intention) as being in continual dialogue with the action of construction. This dialogue is often unspoken, ‘beneath’ or ‘before’ conscious thought.

The process of ‘making’ as Gell and Ingold refer to it, requires continuity between immanent and conscious forms of meaning generated through a process of ‘dialogue’ between artist and material. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) describe this sense of continuity as fundamental when mapping pre-conscious meaning to conscious thought and abstract concepts. This process of ‘dialogue’ enacted by the artist through practical action is what Bourdieu might refer to as a *scheme transfer*, the performative relation of homologous forms of activity.¹⁸ For Bourdieu, this immanent cognitive state was developed through the practice of the body, an embodied *habitus* that frames our everyday attitudes and performances within the social sphere. Lizardo (2004) explains that Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, refers to generative structures of practical action, or ‘practical metaphors’.¹⁹ So there exists an ability for differing modes of perception to *shift* across senses and from immanent to explicit meaning. I would suggest that these processes of dialogue, practice and scheme transfer enable artists to locate forms of immanent meaning in objects without a conscious concept being generated.

The ‘True Fetish’: The Fetishisation of Affect

The personal attribution of value and affect, while informed by the social norms that Bourdieu and Gell examine, is something bound to the microcosm of individuals, something that Leiris (1929) describes as an intense personal crises. According to Leiris, this form of crises acts as a formative point when one experiences the ‘true fetish’:

...there are moments which one can call *crises* which alone are important in a life. These are moments when the outside seems abruptly to respond to the sum of what we throw forth from within, when the exterior world opens to encounter our heart and establishes a sudden communication with it.²⁰

Pietz (1985) argues that Leiris’ ‘true fetish’ focuses upon the subjective response as an intense personal movement from inside the self towards the object, where the object is able to recall that

17. Ingold, *The perception of the environment: essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*.

18. “The logic of scheme transfer which makes each technique of the body a sort of *pars total* is, predisposed to function in accordance with the fallacy *pars pro toto*, and hence to evoke the whole system of which it is a part, gives a very general scope to the seemingly most circumscribed and circumstantial observances.” Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice*: 94.

19. Omar Lizardo, “The cognitive origins of Bourdieu’s *habitus*,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 34(2004): 8.

20. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part I,” 11. Quotes taken are Pietz’s translations of the original: Leiris, “Alberto Giacometti,” 209.

moment of affective union between the senses and the material world.²¹ This embodied response to the fetish shifts our focus from misrecognition towards a personal connection with material objects. The movement of perception, from self to object and back reinforces states of abjection and liminality addressed earlier, a sense of thresholds and boundary collapse. Again I return to Pietz (1985) for his elucidation of Leiris' thoughts on the 'true fetish':

The 'true fetishism which remains at the base of our human existence' is here called 'a love— truly *amoureux* [infatuated]— of ourselves, projected from inside to outside and clothed in a solid carapace which imprisons it within the limits of a precise thing and situates it, like a piece of furniture [*meuble*, a movable property] which we can use in that strange, vast room called space.' The fetish is, then, first of all, something intensely personal, whose truth is experienced as a substantial movement from 'inside' the self (the self as totalized through an impassioned body, a 'body without organs') into the self-limited morphology of a material object situated in space 'outside.' Works of art are true fetishes only if they are material objects at least as intensely personal as the water of tears.²²

The fluidic concept that Leiris refers to as the 'water of tears' describes the sensation that the fetish recreates, reiterating that initial climax of intimacy between the self and the fetish object. This aspect of the sensate 'reality' of the 'true fetish', operates physically and emotionally, becoming perceived as an extension of the self, incorporated into an image schema of the body. So while the kinetic motion of excretion defines the psychic process of abjection, the 'true fetish' embodies a movement of the self into the other, into the carapace of the fetish thing. The 'true fetish' replaces the gaze of the disinterested aesthetic viewer with their personal, affective and emotional state.

Magical objects operating through principles of contagion and sympathy often bear no physical resemblance or scientific correlation to their intended effects. What Mauss and Hubert (1972) characterise as the magical influence of the 'poorly executed ideogram' would seem to have relevant import into those contemporary art objects that refuse any doctrine of pictorial accuracy. In Western Europe at the end of 19th century, a shift occurred away from the tradition of representational art, especially within the field of painting. The Cubists, especially Cezanne and later Picasso, tore away from traditional conceptions of representational painting or 'retinal painting' as it became critiqued.²³ The defection from the tradition of 'retinal' acuity meant that forms of abstraction away from pictorial realism could occur. Throughout the first half of the 20th Century the Surrealist and Dada movements would exploit the offerings of Freud's psychoanalytic concepts along with the rich material culture of 'primitive art' presented in the burgeoning museums exhibiting colonial spoils, to pursue forms of artistic expression beyond the traditions of Europe. The use of the body within the works of these artists became a central theme and its associations

21. Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, part I," 11-12.

22. Ibid. Quotes of Leiris are translated by Pietz and taken from Leiris, "Alberto Giacometti," 209.

23. This separation from 'retinal' art was largely a move by the Cubists, Gleizes and Metzinger who first developed the term 'retinal painting', referring to an a blind acceptance of the what the retina presented without 'intellectual control'. Duchamp agreed with the spirit of the critique, but Cezanne would become its poster child: "his work 'proves irrefutably that painting is not—or is no longer—the art of imitating an object by lines and colors, but of giving plastic consciousness to our instincts.'" T.D. Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 72.

with a primitive spirit or essence was apparent in the psychological space in which many of these works operated. However, there is an incorporation of the female body in particular that reiterates much of the eroticising that is pivotal to fetishistic tropes within art of the time. Lomas (2000) places the surrealist legacy within this historical context: “Whatever subversive intent the surrealists may have professed is vitiated by their unquestioning complicity with a dominant male phallocentrism.”²⁴ Artists such as Hans Bellmer (1902-1975) offer some explicit examples of a psychoanalytic understanding of the fetishisation of body parts (Figure 14). Bellmer’s photo collage for the cover of *Le Surréalisme* presents a dissected voluptuary, reconstituted and bound, taking our gaze into a tactile appreciation of the female body, a body reduced to flesh without mind. The title, *Store in a Cool Place* (1958), situates the female body as meat for the larder, something to consume, something passive to be acted upon. This reiteration of the fetishised trope of female eroticisation locates the dominant values of the male gaze and entrenches further the perception of the fetish’s aberrant and perverse nature.

The location of the female body within the work of Surrealist artists such as Bellmer, represented a broader philosophy within the Surrealist movement, the concept of the abject derived from the writings of authors such as Bataille and Leiris in the journal *Documents* (1929-30). Bataille’s concept of the abject was conceived as a category of excrement, leftovers from that which could not be homogenised and hierarchised, becoming known as a theory of heterogeneity.²⁵ The process of fetishisation as a transposition of symbolic value, as Bourdieu defines it, differs from what Bataille refers to as ‘base materialism’, or Leiris as “True Fetishism”. Bataille’s use of the term ‘abjection’, also differs slightly from Kristeva’s psychoanalytic placement of the term. For Bataille, the abject was coupled with his ideas on the *informe* and heterologic as critiques of structure, relating to the scatologic. This term in itself implies a connection to Kristeva’s views on excremental body waste as fundamentally abject, but for Bataille, the excremental was a necessary product of the structures that organise and totalise, producing the aberrational as a by-product, that which cannot be absorbed by the process of normalising concepts. For Kristeva the abject is necessary for the definition of the self; for Bataille, the abject is necessary for the creation of order and structure. For both theorists, the abject stands in a position of incorporation and rejection. The abject then becomes the negative space that defines the self, the abject becoming the quintessential ‘other’, that which is not self. The tension here with the fetish object is something exterior which the subject wants to incorporate within the body, while the abject is something that cannot be incorporated. The two categories operate on a precipice between self and other, fundamentally liminal, oscillating between incorporation and rejection.

The term ‘abject art’ gained currency within the contemporary art of the 1980s and 1990s, exemplified by the work of artists such as Cindy Sherman, Mona Hatoum, Robert Gober, Gilbert and George, and Andres Serrano; incorporating post-structuralist and post-modern critique of traditional homogenous categories of race, gender, and sexuality (Mey 2007; Fusco 1991).²⁶ The

24. David Lomas, *The haunted self : surrealism, psychoanalysis, subjectivity* (New Haven, CT ; London : Yale University Press, 2000), 53.

25. Bataille, *Visions of excess: selected writings 1927-1939*: 144-54.

26. See Ch. 3 “Art and Dis-ease” in K. Mey, *Art and obscenity* (London : New York: I.B. Taurus, 2007); Coco Fusco, “Sublime abjection: An interview with Andres Serrano,” *Third Text* 5, no. 16-17 (1991). Perhaps the most profound exemplar of this ‘abject art’ was Serrano’s *Piss Christ* (1987), a photograph of a small plastic crucifix submerged in the artist’s urine.

use of the abject within Western art also signaled a shift from the representational and visual, to the affective, as Foster (1996) describes, it, “from the real understood as an effect of representation to the real understood as an event of trauma.”²⁷ The shift towards the sensory and affective established a significant reappraisal of traditional aesthetics, as Koerner (1997) explains:

Indeed, like many controversies in contemporary art history, questions of the canon would actually be better answered through a focus on the abject. For unlike objects, which ask to be judged as what they in themselves are, abjection exists in its effects, as a response elicited in the subject. That is why, in fact, study of the abject has served the broader shift within our discipline away from traditional aesthetics and towards a new, affective approach to art. For feelings of nausea, unlike sentiments of beauty, cannot easily be projected or disgorged, no matter how hard we retch.²⁸

The power of abjection creates a sensate and affective response in the subject. While attributions of taste and value can be claimed as socially defined, it is the relationship of the subject to an abject response that creates this profound sense of overwhelming. While the term ‘abject art’ stands as a moniker for art and artists that reference the excremental and the nauseating—particularly during the 1980s and 1990s—Menninghaus (2002) states that this is more within the rhetoric of ‘shock’ value than it is a true alliance with the philosophy of Kristeva.

‘Abject Art’ is not a category of art-historical scholarship but an evocative label belonging to the (self-)representation of the art scene and to strategies appropriate for its marketing. Rosalind Krauss’s rather unflattering descriptions may well prove apt in the case of certain works under this label—or in connection with their interpretation in the catalogue to the exhibition *Abject Art*—more apt than they are in reference to Julia Kristeva’s theory itself. The commonsensical question ‘Why do artists want to make objects that are abject?’ has the ring of déjà vu: Why did Baudelaire sing of his beloved as carrion? Why did Romanticism embrace an affirmative poetics of disgusting decomposition, one which licences disgusting impotence, too? The explanations offered for ‘Abject Art’ likewise ring a familiar note. For one thing, there is the pressure for innovation within the system of art itself, a pressure to which—in Friedrich Schlegel’s words—the aesthetics of the ‘shocking,’ of the strongest possible stimuli, provides an especially viable response, one that has taken the most varied forms in the past two hundred years or so. The disgusting may well be the strongest possible stimulator of the human perceptual apparatus. It generates strong defensive affects which, at the same time, are powerful instants of self-perception on the part of the system forced to defend its own integrity...In light of its routine recourse to mechanisms of shock and provocation, ‘abject art’ soon appears to have lost much of its confidence in being an antidote to boredom (Baudelaire’s ennui) or to other forms of cultural satiation. Correspondingly, the premeditated will to shock—which, for today’s artists, entails testing the limits of one’s own museability—is often checked by a self-irony

27. Foster, “Obscene, Abject, Traumatic,” 106.106.

28. Joseph Leo Koerner, “The Abject of Art History,” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 31 (1997): 5.



Figure 14. Hans Bellmer
Tenir au frais (maquette pour la couverture de: *Le Surréalisme*, No. 4) (*Store in a Cool Place* [Layout for the cover of *Le Surréalisme*, No. 4]), 1958
 collage of vintage gelatine silver prints and gouache on masonite
 23.4 x 23.9 cm

signaled as though with a wink of the eye. The desired intensity of affect can blend as smoothly as one likes with the evocation of shoulder-shrugging indifference toward ‘lumpy things’: ‘pure affect, no affect.’²⁹

The shock value of the abject within contemporary art, while creating a sensate response of nausea, for Menninghaus, does not approximate the subtlety of Kristeva’s arguments. The excremental and visceral aesthetics employed by artists such as Gilbert and George, play upon the social stigma attached to homophobia, exploiting the scatological as a poster child to shock. Menninghaus’ work attempts to contextualise the post-modern and post-structuralist responses of artists within a broader artistic vogue to push social boundaries.

29. Winfried Menninghaus, *Disgust: the theory and history of a strong sensation*, trans. Howard Eiland and Joel Golb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 398. Menninghaus quotes Hal Foster (“pure affect, no affect”) from Foster, “Obscene, Abject, Traumatic,” 122.

The categorisation of the abject and confrontation of the foreign is a problem for those defining art in a cross-cultural context. Okoye (2005) points out the problem that ethnographers have with their own experiences of the abject and the unfamiliar in their encounters with ‘Other’ cultures. The urge to linger or flee is a powerful one and Okoye relates the experience of lingering to Art History’s privileging of that attitude towards so-called canonical art. The time spent lingering over presented art, enshrined in a gallery or museum represents an act of detached aesthetic security. The incorporation of the ethnographic abject into the museological ensures an act of institutional purification, taming the threat of the Other and categorically rationalising its placement within the discourse of the canon of art history and the artefactual.³⁰ It also provides a platform through which the sensuous activity of gazing and the ocular provide a distance afforded by that sense. Ellman (1990) proffers the observation that smell, and the unhindered imbibition of an object’s essence through ‘stench’, acts to “dissolve the limits of the private body, so that the very notion of identity subsides into pneumatic anarchy.”³¹ However, Koerner (1997) points to the incorporation of the abject by artists as a means of critiquing the tradition of a detached contemplative gaze:

For in recent art [mid to late 1990s], abjection denotes more than simply incorporating or indexing base and repellent things like garbage, shit, hair, and rotten meat into artworks. Abjection assaults the very notion of objects purified of affect. And the criticism developed to explicate this assault attempts, in turn, to undermine an art history that, undertaken as if by self-sovereign subjects, remains confident of its objectivity.³²

Koerner here interprets these materialities of pollution as much more profound than eliciting mere shock, but instead a challenge to the very aesthetic paradigm of the detached gaze. The assault on the senses evoked by the materiality of these ‘abject artworks’ implies a leap from the pictorial plane, away from the image towards the object, something which appears to remove the implication of sensuality but instead actualises it.

Hollier (1994) defines Bataille’s concept of the abject as an immovable relationship between subject and abject:

It is the subject that is abject. That is where his attack on metaphoricity comes in. If you die, you die; you can’t have a substitute. What can’t be substituted is what binds subject and abject together. It can’t simply be a substance. It has to be a substance that addresses a subject, that puts the subject at risk, in a position from which it cannot move away.³³

The ‘metaphoricity’ that Bataille attacks is the referential nature of language, as opposed to the reality of horror, the abject. Bataille conceived of a relationship with art that operated through a

30. Ikem Stanley Okoye, “Linger or Flee? Pieter Aertsen, Pieter Aertsen, “Iguegha Uhe.” Michel Leiris,” in *Anthropologies of art*, ed. Mariët Westermann (Williamstown, Mass. : New Haven : Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute ; Distributed by Yale University Press, 2005).

31. Menninghaus, *Disgust : the theory and history of a strong sensation*: 95.

32. Koerner, “The Abject of Art History,” 6.

33. Hal Foster et al., “The Politics of the Signifier II: A Conversation on the “Informe” and the Abject,” *October* 67, no. Winter, 1994 (1994): 117.

form of ‘base materialism’, where the materiality of the art object operates without transposition, illusion, or substitution. “I defy any collector whatever to love a painting as much as a fetishist loves a shoe.”³⁴ (Figure 15) Bataille’s conception of this relationship was the *informe*, or formless, produced as the excrement unable to be incorporated through the normalising action of homogeneity. Leiris (1929) explains, discussing the work of Giacometti:

Worshippers of those frail ghosts that are our moral, logical, and social imperatives, we thus attach ourselves to a transposed fetishism, the counterfeit of the one that deeply animates us, and this bad fetishism absorbs the largest part of our activity, leaving almost no place for true fetishism, the only kind that is really worthy, because altogether self-conscious and therefore independent of any deception. In the world of art it is scarcely possible to find objects (sculptures or paintings) capable of responding in some way to the requirements of this true fetishism.³⁵

The ‘true fetishism’ that Leiris describes operates as an affective state of self-awareness, not misrecognition or deception. This form of the fetish incorporates a profound sense of reality, what the abject heralds as an unavoidable confrontation with the self, and yet a rejection of its stark reality. Žižek (2001) characterises this acceptance of the fetish as the embodiment of the lie that helps us define and cope with the truth:

...a fetish can play a very constructive role of allowing us to cope with the harsh reality: fetishists are not dreamers lost in their private worlds, they are thoroughly ‘realists,’ able to accept the way things effectively are—since they have their fetish to which they can cling in order to cancel the full impact of reality.³⁶

This tension between truth and fiction defines the nature of the fetish. The perspective from which one views a fetishist’s devotion, as fetishist or voyeur, defines a perception of truth and fiction, normal or perverse. This movement of the fetish from a veneer of disavowal towards Leiris’ ‘true fetish’, helps define a connection between the abject and fetish as the real affects of objects upon subjects. A tension exists as the movement of perception shifts from that of the insider to the outsider, from the adherents of a fetish’s power to the sceptic or voyeur of that power. One emphasising truth—the affective and sensual—and the other, the image of truth, a misrecognition. Žižek here rephrases a point that Freud (1927) makes regarding the fetish—“the horror of castration sets up a sort of permanent memorial to itself by creating this substitute.”³⁷ This action of memorialising the disavowed operates to acknowledge what one is beholden to deny. The fetish here operates as a curious paradoxical testament by obfuscating the source from which it originates and yet reiterating that existence. Iversen (2007) stresses that this disavowal operates in oscillation with recognition.³⁸ Reiterating the work of Mannoni (1969), Iversen states: “The experience of the moment of recognition, Mannoni stresses, is not effaced [by the fetish]. It leaves behind a

34. G. Bataille, *Premiers écrits, 1922–1940: Histoire de l’œil - L’Anus solaire - Sacrifices - Articles*, vol. 1, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 273.

35. Leiris, “Alberto Giacometti,” 209.

36. Slavoj Žižek, “Self-Deceptions: On Being Tolerant and Smug,” *Die Gazette* (2001): unpaginated website.

37. Sigmund Freud, “Fetishism,” in *Miscellaneous Papers 1888–1938, Collected Papers* (London: Hogarth and Institute of Psycho-Analysis 1925–1950, 1927), 200.

38. M. Iversen, *Beyond pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 92.

stigma indelible, one that is utterly ineradicable. Only the conscious recollection of the traumatic experience is effaced.”³⁹ While these comments reflect in particular a psychoanalytic perspective of memorialising the trauma of perceived castration—the mother’s missing penis—the concept of the fetish as a *stigma indelible* reinforces the role of the fetish to materialise the immaterial, reifying the abstract into concrete form, albeit a paradoxical one. The memorialising function of the fetish reiterates Pietz’s (1987) theme of its historicising ability to fix and then repeat its originating moment.⁴⁰

While the fetish and abject may share qualities of real sensate responses to the material world, the two terms are not coterminous. In Chapter 1 the history of the term fetish was explored to outline some common tropes that exist within the popular consciousness of Euro-American culture and to understand the archaeology of the term’s usage. While the tendency to fetishise may now be considered, within the theoretical discourse of anthropology, a creative part of human/object relations, its development within the canon of Western art history has associated the term with the concepts of primitivism and the unenlightened. The placement of the fetish within this aesthetic arena of the sensuous, as opposed to the contemplative, had aesthetic consequences that resulted in its proximity to abject states and processes of abjection. According to a psychoanalytic interpretation, while the abject confronts us with the undeniability of the real, the fetish operates to memorialise the real. The fetish then, while maintaining a connection to the body through cognitive processes of metaphor and metonymy as well as sensate relationship with the body, obscures its own *raison d’être* from the conscious mind, instead leaving a memorial to the reason for its inception. So at this point of misrecognition the fetish departs from the abject, for while our responses to the abject may be sensate and pre-conceptual, a part of the archaic mind as Kristeva argues, the abject cannot be denied or disavowed. Does this indicate then that the fetish operates to conceal a horror far worse than the abject? Or something profoundly personal and meaningful in a very different way?

3.2 The Sensuous and the Reified

The fetish and its incorporation into the body of those that believe in its power raises fundamental questions regarding our sensual relationship to things. The reified nature of the fetish establishes as the sole source of meaning, untranscended as Pietz (1985) argues. Within contemporary fine art, there has been a shift from a model of detached contemplation acknowledged by authors such as Foster (1996) toward the sensate and immersive.⁴¹ Within anthropology and museology today there is a recognition that the cross-cultural considerations of art, and material culture generally, incorporate social knowledge of sensory regimes reflecting a cultural experience of the world beyond the purely visual (Edwards et al (2006); Pels (1998)).⁴² Johnson (2007) argues that there is has been a general conflation of modern aesthetics into the category of beauty, which

39. Ibid. quoted from Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l’imaginaire, ou l’autre scene*, Le champ freudien (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), 12.

40. Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, part II,” 23.

41. Buck-Morss, *The origin of negative dialectics*: 87.

42. Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth B. Phillips, eds., *Sensible objects : colonialism, museums, and material culture*, English ed. (Oxford ; New York : Berg, 2006); Pels, “The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy,” 100.

Morphy (2010) acknowledges as having been a consideration in the rejection of aesthetics by some within anthropology as a useful category for cross-cultural considerations of art (Overing 1996; Gell 1998).⁴³ This is perhaps exemplary of Menninghaus' (2003) observations of the origins of Enlightenment aesthetic principles:

...whatever does not produce a purely aesthetic pleasure is implicitly disqualified as *impure*; from Baumgarten to Kant, none of the founding figures of aesthetics fails to depreciate the 'mere' pleasures of the 'lower senses' when compared to the elevated level of purely aesthetic pleasure.⁴⁴



Figure 15. Vienna, Austria
Fetish boot with a heel of 11 inches, c. 1900
Collection Guillen; Musée International
de le Chaussure du Romans, France
Photo: Elizabeth Eyliu

I agree with Morphy, Johnson and Menninghaus regarding the importance of an aesthetic that

43. Johnson, *The meaning of the body*: 211; Morphy, "Art as Action, Art as Evidence," 269; Gell, *Art and agency*; J. Overing, "Is aesthetics a cross-cultural category? Against the motion," in *Key Debates in Anthropology*, ed. T. Ingold (London: Routledge, 1996).

44. Menninghaus, *Disgust: the theory and history of a strong sensation*: 95.

encompasses the sensorium beyond just vision. In doing so, the register of affective responses and the meaning associated with those responses is culturally relative—the perception of self and the experience of the senses being filtered by what Johnson (2007) states are various ‘bodies’: the body as biological organism; the ecological body; the phenomenological body; the social body; the cultural body.⁴⁵ This gives rise to varying experiences of selfhood; experiences that may not be discretely defined by the physical body as argued by Strathern (1988, 1991).⁴⁶ Strathern’s concepts have been developed further to explore the potential of not only shifting ontologies of selfhood, but also shifting relationships to things—things as meanings,—not as containers of meaning, but things as heuristic operators (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007).⁴⁷ Henare, Holbraad & Wastell define a methodology that re-orientates traditional ethnographic styles of epistemological analysis, looking instead at an artefact-orientated anthropology that investigates the potential for ‘things’ to elucidate multiple ontologies through a process of heuristics revealing how we ‘think through things’.

[T]he difference between an analytic and a heuristic use of the term ‘things’ is that while the former implies a classificatory repertoire intended for refinement and expansion the latter serves to carve out things (as an appropriately empty synonym for ‘objects’ or ‘artefacts’) as the field from which such repertoires might emerge. Analytics parse, heuristics merely locate.⁴⁸

This approach also implies a broader intellectual problematic within anthropology, one that questions whose reality (or worldview) you operate from, or indeed if there is a reality which we can accurately describe at all.⁴⁹ While this might seem a departure from the aesthetics of experiencing fetish objects, it represents a broader struggle within philosophy regarding possibilities of truth and sensate reality.

The incorporation of the senses within contemporary Western art appreciation recognises the broader role that the body plays in building meaningful responses to objects. Beyond the aesthetics of the gaze and representation, immanent and non-cognitive meaning are generated by objects acting upon our senses; as a means of mediating understanding between the conscious and unconscious. As Pels (1998) claims:

I would suggest that the materiality of human interaction with things is best studied in terms of *aesthetics*: the material process of mediation of knowledge through the senses...Not only are humans as material as the material they mold, but humans themselves are molded, through their sensuousness, by the ‘dead’ matter with which they are surrounded.⁵⁰

Pels reiterates earlier sentiments of Horkheimer (1972) in his theorisation of the senses as

45. Johnson, *The meaning of the body*: 275-77.

46. Strathern, *The gender of the gift*; ———, *Partial connections* (Savage, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1991).

47. Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell, *Thinking through things : theorising artefacts in ethnographic perspective*, 5.

48. ———, “Introduction: thinking through things,” 5.

49. Ibid., 10-11.

50. Maud Ellman, “Eliot’s Abjection,” in *Art, mimesis, and the avant-garde : aspects of a philosophy of difference* ed. Andrew E; Benjamin and John; Fletcher (London ; New York : Routledge, 1991), 195.

mediating points in our knowledge of the world.⁵¹ The material world operates as an interface to different modes of understanding and conceptualising the world. Just as the fetish objects, and objects of religious devotion, operate to reify, and therefore make real, immaterial realms of meaning (Pietz 1985; Malafouris 2007), Morphy (2009) acknowledges art also functions in this capacity:

Mediation is always a component of material culture objects but the mediating role is fundamental to art objects. They mediate between domains of existence, they mediate between artist and audience, and they mediate between an object that they are an index of and the person interacting with that object.⁵²

The act of mediation between the physicality of objects and their conceptual components can make their separation difficult and at times perhaps non-existent. While authors such as Miller (2005) maintain a dualist separation and dialectic exchange between the material and immaterial realms, this separation may be more intellectual than practical. Miller argues for the material importance in expressing the immaterial:

...the more humanity reaches toward the conceptualization of the immaterial, the more important the specific form of its materialization...Modern art depends on a similar strategy. The more esoteric the conceptualized, the more value its performance. The more we come to believe that art is actually transcendent, the more its material form is worth in dollars. Similarly in the field of religion, the more we feel the deity is beyond our comprehension and representation, the more valuable the medium of our objectification, whether sacrifice or prayer.⁵³

While Miller defines artistic value in monetary terms, his points regarding the 'objectification' of transcendent qualities through the material realisation of 'things' here connects with Malafouris' argument regarding the intrinsic value of the material expression of religious concepts—reification.

If we accept the necessity of an embodied aesthetic approach to understanding fetish objects, and therefore fetish qualities of art, reification requires an understanding of the connection between the sensuous (aesthetic) and non-sensuous (conceptual, linguistic). The connection to the transcendent qualities of art and the importance of its material execution, reinforce the connection between the sensuous and non-sensuous realms as Benjamin (1933) describes them.⁵⁴ Benjamin (1939) posits

51. Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 200.

52. Pels, "The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy."

53. Miller, "Introduction," 28.. Miller's process of 'objectification' is critiqued by Fowles (2010) as being an odd dialectic that starts with the binary opposition of material:immaterial and concludes with the same binary. Further, Fowles accuses Miller of ignoring the cultural relativity of 'materiality', itself being an abstract concept rather than a concrete one. Fowles argues further for considerations of meaning established through cases of absence, especially a material form of absence. S. Fowles, "People Without Things," in *An Anthropology of Absence: Materializations of Transcendence and Loss*, ed. M. Bille, F. Hastrup, and T.F. Sørensen (New York: Springer, 2010), 28-29. Buchli (2010) counters, stating that, the perceived paradox of realising the immaterial via material means, is in fact "an artifact of our particular terms of analysis and in fact an ideological effect of the productive dualisms that structure social life." V. Buchli, "Presencing the Im-Material," in *An Anthropology of Absence: Materializations of Transcendence and Loss*, ed. M. Bille, F. Hastrup, and T.F. Sørensen (Springer, 2010). On Fowles' point regarding the importance of absence, see Sansi-Roca (2005) on fetish power generated through the act of withholding the material presence of worshipped objects: Roger Sansi-Roca, "The Hidden Life of Stones: Historicity, Materiality and the Value of Candomble Objects on Bahia," *Journal of Material Culture* 10, no. 2 (2005).

54. Walter Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," *New German Critique*, no. 17 (1979 [1933]).

a loss of artistic ‘aura’ from an art object, the further removed a sense of the ‘authentic’ object is displaced by its image (a copy), something accelerated by the processes of mechanical reproduction of objects and images.⁵⁵ Buck-Morss (Kester 1997) explains Benjamin’s position on the importance of the debris of mass culture:

his argument is, rather, that the technological conditions of production have so thoroughly blurred the boundary between ‘art’ and cultural objects generally that its special, separate status cannot be maintained. Engineering has challenged the special status of architecture, journalism that of literature, photography that of painting, cinema that of theater—and he is optimistic about these developments. They led him to affirm the potential of mass culture, its ability to democratize not only access to culture, but cultural production itself.⁵⁶

In this sense, the question of whether an object is ‘art’ is secondary to the heuristic question regarding how do we think through ‘things’—how are unique moments of meaning established through our relationships with ‘things’.

The concepts of contagion and pollution are woven tightly to the experience of the body and the material metaphors of bodily experience. I agree with Douglas (1969) that the body then operates as a matrix to map onto categorisations of the world, and taken further, through the work of Johnson and Lakoff’s (1980) metaphor theory, there is a profound mapping of bodily experience onto abstract domains of thought. Johnson (2007) argues for an embodied understanding of aesthetic meaning, a consideration of art as establishing significance through non-linguistic forms of meaning. A profound connection exists between the fetish object and the body image of its adherent. The fantastical qualities of the thing deemed a fetish rely on some imaginative capacity of the subject. This magical transformation enables a moment of reification within a physical object. Through this materialisation, the fetish object is fundamentally an abstraction made material; it operates to enable the realisation of such abstract mental, social or personal realms of desire, order and power into the world. The fetish then acts as an interface, as a sensuous mediator between the material body and the untranscended materiality of the fetish object, locating and harnessing the power of the immaterial. The significance of things, especially fetishised things, becomes a question of how to understand that moment of fantasy, the connection between the ‘real’ material world and the subjective process of meaning making. Returning to Henare, Holbraad & Wastell, they argue that the ethnographic enterprise with regard to understanding the meaning of ‘things’ is to acknowledge the unique ontologies possible:

So, if the first step to ‘ontological breakthrough’ is to realise that ‘different worlds’ are to be found in ‘things’, the second one is to accept that seeing them requires acts of conceptual creation — acts which cannot of course be reduced to mental operations (to do so would be merely to revert to the dualism of mental representation versus material reality). On this view, anthropological analysis has little to do with trying to determine how other people think about the world. It

55. ———, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility [Third Version].”

56. Grant H. Kester, “Aesthetics after the End of Art: An Interview with Susan Buck-Morss,” *Art Journal* 56, no. 1 (1997): 38.

has to do with how we must think in order to conceive a world the way they do. In this sense the method of ‘thinking through things’, geared towards creating new analytical concepts, is a recursive one.⁵⁷

This characterisation of ‘thinking through things’ is here presented as a process of understanding alterity itself, the thing as ‘other’. Henare, Holbraad & Wastell present a methodology for understanding cultural forms of meaning established through things, but to what degree does this allow for the differences between subjects? To what degree do the politics of difference and identity play out in an aesthetic theory based upon the senses? If we accept Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1947) indictment of mass culture and the resultant effects of the ‘culture industry’ fetishising art into commodities, at what point do individuals count against the tyranny of the social whole?⁵⁸ As Adorno (1935) states, “the fetish character of commodities is not a fact of consciousness, but dialectic in the eminent sense that it produces consciousness.”⁵⁹ The continuity between pure sensate experience, non-discursive meaning and conceptual thought as argued by Johnson (2007), places the body of the individual as a generator of meaning and the process of meaning making—imaginative thinking. I would like to suggest that Adorno and Benjamin’s principle of ‘exact fantasy’, offers a way to theorise the conjunction of the ‘real’ sensate experience, the thing-as-heuristic, and the personal significance of the fetish object.

3.3 Exact Fantasy

The complications inherent in concepts such as ‘truth’ and ‘fantasy’ outstrip the space available for me to engage with them in any depth. To shorten the argument, I hope I have established that the discourse of the fetish, while varied, illuminates consistencies regarding what Pietz (1985) has defined as key conditions to establish a fetish (historicisation, territorialisation, reification, and personalisation) and its relationship to the body as a primary generator of meaning. Following Pietz’s (2003) assertion that the role of the fetish in contemporary discourse potentially shifts traditional views of aesthetic theory and the role of artists:

For aesthetic theorists, it challenges the traditional exclusion of personal interest, social power and material passion from our conception of the experience of art. For artists, it suggests that their productions may more accurately be regarded as power objects...⁶⁰

The implications for Pietz’s arguments have been explored with regard to meaning established through the body, how cognition of contagion and pollution relate to bodily perceptions of ambiguity, enlivening ‘things’ and incorporating them into the body image of their adherents. Leiris’ concept of the ‘true’ fetish relates to what Pietz asserts as the aesthetic relationship between “personal interest, social power and material passion” to “power objects”. The issues of ‘truth’

57. Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell, “Introduction: thinking through things,” 15.

58. See in particular Chapter 3: The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception in Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, Reprint ed. (London: Verso Editions, 1979 [1947]).

59. Letter, Adorno to Benjamin, August 7, 1935, in Adorno, *Über Walter Benjamin*, p. 112. Quoted from Buck-Morss, *The origin of negative dialectics*: 85.

60. Pietz, “Fetish,” 313.

regarding the fetish—questions regarding the relative and absolutist claims towards the value of things—reiterates the ongoing ontological problems with concepts such as ‘culture’ and the ‘subject’. The aesthetic shift in recent years towards the ‘sensuous’, ‘affective’ and ‘embodied’ reflect a theoretical and social move that recognises the importance of non-linguistic and pre-conceptual forms of meaning, and perhaps a philosophical shift towards the legitimacy of meaning in the absence of language.

The legitimacy of the subject within these broader theoretical models is often ignored in favor of totalising concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘society’. Adorno’s (1931) concept of ‘exact fantasy’ and Walter Benjamin’s unfinished *Arcade’s Project* (*Passagen-Werk*), operate as a means to emphasise the importance of the individual subjective response to art, but also understand the power of translation and the copy—the mimetic gesture. Benjamin and Adorno provide a methodology for explaining the mediation that occurs between subject and object—a dialectic process—placing the individual and the object in an empirical yet imagined world in which the copy of the object remains as an act of translation, a copy as an ‘exact fantasy’. Crucial to this understanding was Adorno’s basis of the subject/object relation in *ars invenendi*, the art of coming upon something, of discovering it for the first time. For Adorno, “the organon of this *ars invenendi*, is however fantasy.”⁶¹

An exact fantasy; fantasy which abides strictly within the material which science presents to it, and reaches beyond them only in the smallest aspects of their arrangement: aspects granted, which fantasy itself must originally generate.⁶²

Adorno’s aesthetic approach to materialism is not at odds with an empirical science as he insists that the fantasy of translation is bound to the material object of scrutiny, not something imagined, but that which is presented to the senses. In Buck-Morss (1977) assessment, Adorno and Benjamin “viewed art as a form of scientific knowledge. Perhaps their most important contribution was to redeem aesthetics as a central cognitive discipline, a form of secular revelation, and to insist on the structural convergence of scientific and aesthetic experience.”⁶³ The moment of fantasy appears to be reigned in by the ‘reality’ of perception of a fixed, observable thing. As Buck-Morss (1977) explains:

‘Exact fantasy’ was thus a dialectical concept which acknowledged the mutual mediation of subject and object without allowing either to get the upper hand. It was not imagination in the sense of subjective projection beyond the existing world either into the past or into the future, it remained ‘immanent,’ within the material phenomena, the factuality of which acted as a control to thought. ‘Exact fantasy’

61. Theodor W. Adorno, “Die Aktualität der Philosophie,” in *Antrittsvorlesung* (Univerität Frankfurt am Main, 1931). First published in *GS* 1 (1973), 325-344. The term ‘exact imagination’ may be less ambiguous, for Adorno, it was the imaginative power of philosophy, where truth is the object, but the act of interpretation always filtered this process. See his use of the term ‘exact imagination’ ———, *Negative Dialectics*, 2 ed. (Continuum, 1973), 46-7. (See S.W. Nicholzen, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno’s Aesthetics* (Mit Press, 1999), 229. n.9; K.G. MacKendrick, *Discourse, Desire, and Fantasy in Jürgen Habermas’ Critical Theory* (Routledge, 2008), 23. It is not clear whether the act of ‘exact fantasy’ simply ‘discovers’ the ‘truth’ or ‘produces’ it. C. Bartolovich and N. Lazarus, *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 250.

62. Adorno, “Die Aktualität der Philosophie,” 341.

63. Buck-Morss, *The origin of negative dialectics*: xiii.

was scientific in its refusal 'to step out of the perimeters of the elements.' Yet like art, it rearranged the elements of experience, the 'riddle-figures of empirical existence', until they opened up to cognitive understanding. It was this interpretive arrangement that brought to light what Adorno meant by the 'logic of the matter.' The subject yielded to the objects, yet it did not leave them unchanged. Instead of being merely duplicated in thought, they were transformed within a verbal representation.⁶⁴

Buck-Morss' comments reflect upon an ongoing professional dialogue between Adorno and Benjamin. Benjamin's conception of 'truth' in philosophy involves a necessary mimesis of objects, transformed through language using the process of 'exact fantasy' to maintain the 'aura' of the object. Objects in themselves are mute, without language, but having their own internal logic according to Benjamin. The mimetic role of language, Benjamin argued, was a higher order of a fundamental human propensity to mime.⁶⁵ Buck-Morss (1977) explains how Adorno and Horkheimer, in their *Dialektik der Aufklärung (Dialectic of Enlightenment)* (1947), relate their concept of mimesis to its "origins in primitive magic, in the shaman's imitation of nature. When magic disintegrated, mimesis survived as a principle of artistic representation."⁶⁶ Fundamental then to these concepts of philosophical truth, is the truth of mimesis, of the faithfulness of translation through the act of perception and then conceptualisation.

The body in Benjamin's sense seems to become a shifting sensorium, influenced by the technologies of vision and image construction. In his essay, *Doctrine of the Similar* (1933), Benjamin argues that the mimetic faculty operates as a transformation from the archaic sensuous realm of similarity to the non-sensuous realm of language and conception. Like Miller (2005) who conceptualises a binary of materiality and immateriality, Benjamin (1933) proposes the sensuous and non-sensuous. Technologies of reproduction act inherently as mimetic translators, for Benjamin, the camera acts through its reproductive capacity, removing the auratic properties attached to a perception of the 'original', and effectively changing the sensorium of the viewer. Taussig (1993) explains:

Benjamin's theses on mimesis are part of a larger argument about the history of representation and what he chose to call 'the aura' of works of art and cult objects before the invention of mimetic machines such as the camera. These machines, to state the matter simplistically, would create a new sensorium involving a new subject-object relation and therefore a new person. In abolishing the aura of cult objects and artworks, these machines would replace mystique by some sort of object-implicated enterprise, like surgery, for instance, penetrating the body of reality no less than that of the viewer.⁶⁷

According to Benjamin, technology then reconstitutes the subject's 'exact fantasy' by infiltrating the sensorium, re-mapping habituated modes of perception. Benjamin uses vision and the imagery that the body absorbs through the eyes, as a means to conceptualise the effects of image reproduction

64. Ibid., 86-87.

65. Ibid., 85-88.

66. Ibid., 86-87.

67. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*: 24.

technology (at the time, photography and cinema) upon the sensory scheme. While this reinforces the hegemony of sight above the other senses, it indeed complicates the act of fantasy and the perception of exactness and implicates the entire sensory scheme.

The moment of ‘fantasy’, for Adorno at least, operates more consistently as an act of interpretation, in which is inherent an imaginative capacity to recreate, making a copy in a different guise. The cognitive act of incorporating the fetish into the image of our bodies therefore integrates a process of imagination into the perceptual process. The fetish object metaphorically integrates into the image of the body, perceptually acting as an external organ. Returning to the principles of sympathy and contagion, the power and efficacy of a thing to herald a magical essence seems akin to Benjamin’s concept of the aura. The degree of power or aura diminishes the further a copy iterates itself from the originating gesture of sympathy or contagion. For Benjamin then, the aura of the artwork establishes through a perception of originality, from which a sense of wonder and enchantment follow. I suggest that this auratic sensation also occurs as Leiris (1927) describes it, as the ‘water of tears’—the intense personal relationship that incorporates the fetish into the body of its adherent.

The point at which this sensory filtration occurs within the perceptual and cognitive scheme leaves open some debate regarding the aesthetic response. At what point can one consider sensation ‘authentic’, unfiltered through the acculturated sensory scheme that Benjamin suggests? The separation of a personal, subjective aesthetic (sensate) response from a totalised acculturated one has political implications for criticality, Buck-Morss (Kester 1997) argues:

What I am saying is that even if there is not a universal common sense of ‘beauty,’ all cognition has, necessarily, a sensory or ‘aesthetic’ component—and this is precisely the component upon which the power of criticism rests. The critical power of art, or any cultural form, may not be perceived universally, but if it *is* perceived, it hits you in the gut. Now this somatic experience resists predatory reason, precisely because it can’t be stomached, gobbled up by the mind. If experience leaves a nondigestible residue that won’t go away, that is food for critical cognition...

Of course, you will protest that there is no possibility of *a* philosophical anthropology—bodies are too different, sexually, ethnically, class-wise. I would not disagree that differences matter in certain contexts. But if the question is one of sniffing danger, these differences are not crucial. If a house is burning, you yell, ‘everybody out!’ Now, even if some people are arguing that (in certain cultures) women can tolerate more physical pain than men, it would be absurd to suggest that they stay in the burning building. You yell ‘everybody out,’ and you mean it. You don’t go over a checklist of ‘difference’ before you scream your head off. The body as a cognitive organ can, at least given the same physical environment, be described with a fair amount of universalism. This is true of the brain as well, which I like to think of as a body part, and not as some decorporealized *Seele* or *Geist*...

In the context of a changed notion of aesthetics the work of ‘artists’ also changes. Rather than creating ‘art,’ the goal would be to provide in their representations, of whatever kind, a somatic experience that is self-reflexive-critical, in the philosophical sense.⁶⁸

The ‘truth’ effects of a fetish experience of art seem located in some visceral encounter with the world of things, which alone may act to memorialise the experience as a *stigma indelible*. While Freud may insist this memorialises the traumatic, for Pietz the ‘true’ fetish offers a more profound and positive moment, acting as a point from which to revisit moments of sublime abjection. While the abject might be seen as conflated with the excremental designed to elicit shock and disgust, experiences of abjection relating to the ‘true’ fetish are more closely aligned with Kristeva’s concepts of liminality and psychic abjection resulting in experiences of ambiguity. The difficult theoretical terrain that the fetish proffers with its broad usage across disciplines and at times cross-purposes has made any clear resolution of the subject problematic. However, there are clear relationships between how a sense of one’s own body orders an aesthetic response to ‘things’, and how the personal and cultural implicate an altered image of one’s body.

68. Kester, “Aesthetics after the End of Art: An Interview with Susan Buck-Morss,” 42-43.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has addressed key contemporary concerns within the field of art and material culture, namely how best to understand the relationship between people and things; bodies and objects. Throughout the text I have focused upon the body as a matrix through which the meaning of fetish-things might be better understood: the body of the fetishist; the body of the artist, and the fetish itself as a body part. This theoretical framework has profound implications for the practice based research and assumptions regarding the relationship between materiality and the senses. The theoretical concerns of this dissertation are pursued through practice within the studio research. Body metaphors relating to containment, boundaries and fluidity establish material parameters through which object and practice research connects the sensuous relationships between things to cognitive processes of personification and fetishisation.

The value of the ‘fetish’, outside categorical and definitional questions of aesthetics and ‘art’, remains attached to understanding how subjects perceptually incorporate ‘things’ into their own body images. This state of perception can operate through a sense of psychic abjection, experienced as an ambiguity of thresholds, where the boundary between body and fetish object becomes uncertain. Physical bodily acts can incorporate objects into a habitual framework, operating to create a hybrid in Latour’s (1993) terms; however this sense of hybridic interface alone is not sufficient to amount to a fetishised response in a subject. Some sort of *stigma indelible* is required, a truly affective response requiring some tangible memorial to become erected for the subjective psyche to revisit.

The outcomes of the dissertation have profoundly influenced the studio-based component of this thesis. The theoretical discourses of the fetish, its historical construction as an object of that discourse, and its relationship to the body, have established a grounding through which the practice-led research has developed. Assumptions regarding the embodied nature of the subject/viewer within a contemporary art context have led to material investigations into processes of incorporation. Incorporation becomes established through the material investigation of body metaphors—containers, orifices and fluids—following Douglas (1969) and Kristeva (1982) and their assertions that the body can replicate its sensibilities through material and performative manifestations (i.e. sympathetic and contagious principles). These forms of incorporation operate metaphorically and cognitively, rather than through literal processes such as imbibition and consumption. However, forms of sensate interface (touch, sound, smell) operate to invade the boundary of the self, demarcated by the skin, establishing forms of affective meaning.

The discourse of the fetish is challenging and disparate and I have adopted key points from the work of Pietz (1985) to constitute the fetish: historicisation; territorialisation; reification; and personalisation. From these points I have addressed questions regarding material agency, embodied meaning, and subject/object relations. Pivotal to Pietz’s conception of the fetish is his assertion that the self must be considered embodied. Contemporary thought argues that cognition is essentially embodied, challenging traditional Cartesian views of the separation of the mind and body as a dualist structure (Johnson & Lakoff 1980, Johnson 1987, 2007, 2008; Damasio 1994, 1999, 2003,

2005; Lakoff 1987, 1999).¹ The nature of meaning, both conscious and unconscious, operates in accord, on a basis of continuity through processes of metaphorical extrapolation and comparison, generated from the level of bodily sensate experience and becoming more abstracted. Exceptions operate in cases of highly abstracted concepts such as high order mathematics and theoretical physics (and highly abstracted or conceptual art?). Accepting these assertions, the significance of the experience of the fetish operates on a corporeal register, from which other levels of meaning might be metaphorically derived. Ethnographically, this raises questions of how specific ontologies of selfhood and sensory schemes are realised through things, as Henare et al (2007) suggest, thing-as-heuristic. Cross-culturally, the aesthetic position can only be assessed as Morphy (2010) suggests, through an attempt at aesthetic empathy, inducing an understanding of the contextual meaning operating to create specific affective, embodied and cognitive responses to material objects.²

The exegesis maps the processes and material outcomes of studio-based research that is informed by this dissertation, but also fieldwork conducted in Europe in 2009. The fieldwork was conducted largely in the museums of: the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and the Quai Branly Museum, Paris. These institutions offered an insight into the artefactual history that informed the Occidental perspectives of the 19th Century fetish discourse; the material debris that became so vital in constructing the non-European other. These collections demonstrate the importance of the materiality of history to inform and be informed by the cultural perspectives of the time. This is indeed an in-depth level of ethnographic saturation required to understand the meaning of our relation to things. And the implications for the contemporary artist are as Buck-Morss (Kester 1997) suggests, becoming ‘self-reflexive-critical’, an ethnographer of their own work. And the significance seems to lie in subjective moments of interpretive fantasy, engendered by the wake of an artist’s creative gesture. Buck-Morss argues that some aesthetic experiences can be considered totalised, without the need to reference ontological differences in the relational politics of the body.

Questions regarding the animate qualities of things, whether a fetish can be considered to have agency or not, are hotly debated within discourses of material culture. How best to understand what objects do? I agree with Malafouris (1998) when he states that “the iconicity of the image does not simply reflect visual resemblances but rather establishes ontological ones; it is significant for what it does rather than what it refers to as a message or metaphor...”³ The ontologies established through things reinforce the elusive role that meaning without language plays. Fundamentally, it would appear that our relationships with things establishes an understanding about the world that is unique. The importance of expressing concepts of the immaterial, the transcendent or metaphysical, in material terms as Miller (2005) argues, emphasises the importance of the fetish and its ability to reify these ideas. The process of reification operates to give ‘phantom

1. Damasio, *Descartes’ error : emotion, reason, and the human brain*; ———, *The feeling of what happens : body and emotion in the making of consciousness* 1st ed ed. (New York : Harcourt Brace, 1999); ———, *Looking for Spinoza : joy, sorrow, and the feeling brain*, 1st ed ed. (New York : Harcourt, 2003); ———, *Descartes’ error : emotion, reason, and the human brain* (London : Penguin, 2005); Johnson, *The body in the mind*; ———, *The meaning of the body*; ———, “What Makes a Body?,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 22, no. 3 (2008); Johnson and Lakoff, *Metaphors we live by*; Lakoff, *Women, fire, and dangerous things : what categories reveal about the mind*; Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the flesh : the embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought*.

2. Morphy, “Art as Action, Art as Evidence,” 269.

3. Malafouris, “The Sacred Engagement: Outline of a hypothesis about the origin of human ‘religious intelligence’,” 206.

objectivity' to these otherwise intangible concepts. This phantom quality is at the heart of what fosters a fetishist's desire, whether it is considered *mana*, *aura*, *agency* or the psychic trauma of our castrated mother, the incorporation of objects to define us operates through our own moments of exact fantasy. The significance of the personal and subjective, the embodied and affective, is profound when considering our everyday relationships with things. Fetish objects stand at the extreme edge of that relationship, but provide an important viewpoint from which to reconsider how we are informed by the objects around us.

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