

**From:**

*Gabriele Genge, Angela Stercken (eds.)*

**Art History and Fetishism Abroad**

**Global Shiftings in Media and Methods**

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By focusing on the various modes and media of the fetishised object, the anthology shifts the debates on thingness into a new global art historical perspective. The contributors explore the attention given to those material images, in both artistic and cultural practice from the heyday of colonial expansion until today. They show that in becoming vehicles and agents of transculturality, so called »fetishes« take shape in the 17th to 19th century aesthetics, psychology and ethnography – and furthermore inspire a recent discourse on magical practice and its secular meanings requiring altered art historical approaches and methods.

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## Preface

The idea to hold a conference on the concept of the “fetish” and its place in the history of postcolonial art studies – to be followed by a publication – originated in Dakar. A visit to Issa Samb’s Court and studio in May 2008 by the editors of this volume in conjunction with Akinbode Akinbiyi and Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, strikingly showed only what a journey to such places can vividly bring to life – a dissolution of the spatial and temporal certainties our scholarly discipline has attentively and carefully cultivated. Conceptual, performative, and provocative-participatory object art in West Africa converges in this open garden – in a highly unique way – with critical reflections on transnational Modernism. Pictures and images, objects, writings, and materials of the most varied kind and provenance, all in differing condition, in short all manner of things, which are created, gathered together, and rearranged and interchanged on site, can be experienced tangibly, an experience that embraces not only their tactile perception but also the history inscribed in them as well as the reflection on this history.

The conference itself – entitled “Between Fetish and Art: Is Sculpture Trans-cultural, Global, Universal?” – was then finally held in collaboration with Beate Söntgen in 2011; taking place at the institutes of art history in Bochum and Essen, the conference was set in a spatial context allowing diverse connections to be made to artistic and industrial Modernism in the region. The current publication brings together and presents the contributions and discussions to the conference – from both here and abroad – in a condensed form.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all those who helped make the conference and this publication possible. Leading the way was the co-organizer of the conference in 2011, Beate Söntgen, whom we would like to sincerely thank for her immediate willingness to cooperate in the undertaking and the inspiration she provided; we would like to sincerely thank Alma-Elisa Kittner and Gerald Schröder for their stimulating moderation of the discussions. We are also very grateful to

Ilka Potthast and Simone Krämer from Essen University for their unstinting effort in organizing the conference.

We would also like to extend our thanks to the Volkswagen Stiftung, the Folkwang University of Arts, the Förderverein Situation Kunst Bochum and the Ruhr-University Bochum for supporting the conference, which without the hospitality of Hartwig Fischer, Friederike Wappler, and Jörg Eberhard could not have taken place in such prominent locations like the Museum Folkwang, Bochum's Situation Kunst, and the Sanaa building of the Zeche Zollverein in Essen. Support by the Volkswagen Stiftung and funds provided by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) have made the publication of the conference proceedings possible.

This book is the outcome of an extensive exchange with the authors of the contributions and we would like to warmly thank them for their input and suggestions. We would also like to thank Kerstin Meincke for coordinating the project and her diligent proofreading and Paul Bowman for his efforts in translating the German contributions into English. That the appearance of a book concerned with this theme could be elaborated beyond illustrative text-image relationships is due to Lars Breuer, who specially created *Idol | Icon* for the cover.

We would like to dedicate this book to Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, whose intellectual Esprit decisively contributed to the preparations for the conference and this book. Sadly, she did not live to see the publication.

The Editors

Gabriele Genge | Angela Stercken

## Being Abroad – an Introduction

Over the last ten years the concept of the artefact or thing/object has become a preeminent topic of research in the humanities. From a present-day perspective, we may recognize in this development a weariness with deconstructionist methods and the predominance of the media, single out the exhibition boom and the prominent role played by museum institutions and their efforts – necessarily oriented on the exhibit – to communicate and educate, or we may presume that the reception of global cultural objects necessarily involves an analytical discussion of forms of “material culture.” Invariably, it seems that interpretations and evaluations of cultural achievements, communication and mediation are presented primarily in the form of material mediums, manageable agents, and automatically circulating things.<sup>1</sup>

**1|** For the latest research on the concept of the thing/object, building on its reactivation in ethnology, see among others Godelier, Maurice: *Das Rätsel der Gabe: Geld, Geschenke, heilige Objekte*, Munich: Beck, 1999; Kohl, Karl-Heinz: *Die Macht der Dinge: Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte*, Munich: Beck, 2003; Daston, Lorraine: *Things That Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science*, New York: Zone Books, 2004; id.: *Objectivity*, New York: Zone Books, 2007; Edwards, Elizabeth; Gosden, Chris; Phillips, Ruth B.: *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*, Oxford et al.: Berg, 2006; Böhme, Hartmut: *Fetischismus und Kultur: Eine andere Theorie der Moderne*, Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2006; Frank, Michael; Gockel, Bettina; Hauschild, Thomas; Kimmich, Dorothee; Mahlke, Kirsten (eds.): “Fremde Dinge – Zur Einführung,” in: *Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften*, 1 (2007), 9-16; Henare, Amiria J. M. (ed.): *Thinking Through Things. Theorizing Artefacts Ethnographically*, London et al.: Routledge, 2007; Böhme, Hartmut; Endres, Johannes (eds.): *Der Code der Leidenschaften: Fetischismus in den Künsten*, Munich: Fink, 2010; Schmidt-Linsenhoff, Viktoria: *Ästhetik der Differenz: Postkoloniale Perspektiven vom 16. bis 21. Jahrhundert*, Marburg: Jonas, 2010, 243f.; Bischoff, Doerte: *Poetischer Fetischismus: Der Kult der Dinge im 19. Jahrhundert*, Munich: Fink, 2013; Därmann, Iris (ed.): *Kraft der Dinge*, Munich: Fink, 2014.

For the art history of Modernity/Modernism,<sup>2</sup> the terrain of things, or respectively aesthetic objects, is familiar since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the context of the artistic transgressions of genre boundaries in Dadaism and Surrealism.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the discipline first located – and reflected on – the thing concept, namely in the contexts of current “global” visual cultures and their connotations characterized by religion and magic somewhat later, i.e. in relation to their seemingly “pre-modern” irrationality; in other words, ‘irrational’ impulses capable of unsettling or even destabilizing the fundamental definitions and boundaries of the scholarly canon. Recently, with the international CIHA conference on the “Challenge of the Object,” the actuality of the question was apparent for art history, which seeks to position itself beyond meanwhile obsolete aspirations to represent “world art.”<sup>4</sup>

It was the goal of the 2011 conference “Between Fetish and Art. Is Sculpture Transcultural, Global, Universal?,”<sup>5</sup> which forms the basis of this publication, to stake out more precisely for art history the terrain of transcultural visual and artifact cultures in Modernity; at the same time however, a concurrent aim was to also turn their networking in transnational territorial politics into an object of study. The concern was to thus identify boundaries – be they spatial or temporal – to trace in equal measure historical and current debates and the contexts of discussions, and put up for renegotiation the conventional understandings of the concepts of art and the media.<sup>6</sup> In a transcultural comparison, artistic and scholarly practices were to

**2|** On “modernity,” “modernism” and their ideological exclusions, see: Osborne, Peter: *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, London/New York: Verso, 1995; Harrison, Charles: “Modernism,” in: Nelson, Robert S.; Shiff, Robert (eds.): *Critical Terms for Art History* [1996], Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, 188-202; Klinger, Cornelia: “Modern/Moderne/Modernismus,” in: Barck, Karlheinz et al. (eds.): *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, vol. 4, Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002/2010, 121-167, 150; Smith, Terry: “Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question,” in: Condee, Nancy; Enwezor, Okwui; Smith, Terry (eds.): *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2008, 1-19.

**3|** Exh. cat. Paris, MNAM – Centre Pompidou: *L'Informe*. Bois, Yve-Alain; Krauss, Rosalind (eds.), Paris: MNAM, 1996; exh. cat. Vienna, Generali Foundation et al.: *Dinge, die wir nicht verstehen / Things we don't understand*. Buerge, Roger M.; Noack, Ruth (eds.), Vienna: Generali, 2000; exh. cat. Berlin, Georg-Kolbe-Museum: *Die Macht des Dinglichen – Skulptur heute!* Wellmann, Marc (ed.), Cologne: Wienand, 2007.

**4|** Großmann, G. Ulrich; Krutisch, Petra (eds.): *The Challenge of the Object / Die Herausforderung des Objekts: Congress Proceedings*, vol. 1-4, Nuremberg: Verlag des Germanischen Nationalmuseums, 2013. For the models of a world art c.f. Elkins, James: *Is Art History Global?* New York: Taylor & Francis, 2007; Onians, John: *Art, Culture and Nature: From Art History to World Art Studies*, London: The Pindar Press, 2006; Zijlmans, Kitty; Damme, Wilfried van: *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008.

**5|** See: [www.between-fetish-and-art.de](http://www.between-fetish-and-art.de).

**6|** The concept of the medium followed here is based on the artistic genre, albeit not in the confining sense of Clement Greenberg, but rather as a specific reference to a dynamic generated between form and material

be rendered visible in terms of their differences as well as where they intersect, and their respective theoretical and political implications examined. On the one hand, this meant considering varying standpoints on the culture of the artifact and its interpretation; on the other, the discussion on their contexts of origin and reference as well as strategic functionalization was also of importance.

The present volume incorporates a large portion of the – revised and expanded – contributions to the conference which, with varying focal points and approaches, look at these differentiations in art history and artistic practice from the 18<sup>th</sup> century down to the present day and take up the conscious separation of image, sculpture, artifact, and thing or respectively “fetish.” This drawing of boundaries – at once both precursor and product of the colonial discourse and its fundamental strategies of separation and systematization – interrupted an already previously existing network of cultural contacts. Through a canalizing of complex strategies, ideas and imaginations, ultimately those notions and constructs of insular “cultural regions” were generated which still shape sections of art history down to the present day. Whereas painting or sculpture traditionally head the Western genre hierarchy, in Modernism “other” or “primitive” cultures were included in museums, namely in the medium of the artifact or “thing.” At first, the engagement with colonially appropriated objects played a role here, reinforcing in the West notions of exerting a political/ social controllability over the “foreign other.” This process is particularly discernible in the history of the concept of “primitivism,” which was narrowed into an interpretative framework for those cultures that purportedly had no notion of the “image” and could seemingly articulate themselves “only” in objects. The strange “things” were thus considered to be objects of “primitive” veneration, knowledge and communication.<sup>7</sup> Their incorporation into art history then took place via a mediating instance, the photographic image and the culturally comparative visual archives employing this medium, embodied in the undertakings of Carl Einstein, André Malraux and not least Aby Warburg.<sup>8</sup>

appearing in the pictorial object, a dynamic that according to Niklas Luhmann and Gottfried Boehm causes a different aesthetic experience. At the same time, both authors articulate approaches for universal concepts of the image and the medium, and not the transcultural. See Rebentisch, Juliane: *Ästhetik der Installation*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2003, 82f.; c.f. Greenberg, Clement: “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” [1939], in: O’Brian, John (ed.): *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 5-22, 8; Boehm, Gottfried: “Vom Medium zum Bild,” in: Spielmann, Yvonne; Winter, Gundolf (eds.): *Bild – Medium – Kunst*, Munich: Fink, 1999, 165-178.

**7|** For the concept of artistic primitivism and its interpretation of the artefact, see Genge, Gabriele: *Artefakt Fetisch Skulptur: Aristide Maillol und die Beschreibung des Fremden in der Moderne*, Munich/ Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2009.

**8|** See Schmidt-Linsenhoff, Viktoria: *Ästhetik der Differenz: Postkoloniale Perspektiven vom 16. bis 21. Jahrhundert*, Marburg: Jonas, 2010, vol. 1, 291-313; Flach, Sabine; Münz-Koenen, Inge; Streisand, Marianne (eds.): *Der Bilderatlas im Wechsel der Künste und Medien*, Munich: Fink, 2005.

In contrast, if today we understand art history as a site where relational aesthetic notions and concepts meet, as Kobena Mercer has already exemplarily formulated,<sup>9</sup> then these boundaries also have to be put up for renegotiation and reopened: accordingly, “Western” cultural traditions have to be seen as part of an art-history – and not a history of art – that is temporally and spatially much broader in scope, that is transnational, and thus decisively shaped by colonialism; spatial boundaries and chronologies have to be altered and shifted. Whereas the results emerging from analysis of other, “networked” historical spaces are already identifiable in historical and cultural studies, a comparable methodologically grounded undertaking in the field of art history is still in its infancy.<sup>10</sup> By concentrating on the “artistic regimes,” these renegotiations being conducted and played out between image/sculpture and artifact/fetish, this volume puts up for discussion broader approaches towards such a transcultural art history. The aim is to furnish a historically viable access to the implicit preferences, structures and precepts of Western Modernity and – as articulated by Jacques Rancière – reveal forms of “participation” as, so to speak, the “distribution of the sensible.”<sup>11</sup>

The current positions of “Bildwissenschaft” and Picture Theory form the starting point for the present collection: in recent times, with methodological definitions of the image and idolatry, they have also focused attention on the modes of perception and impact that the image has in postcolonial times. Previously, particularly in the German “Bildwissenschaft,” the focus was placed almost exclusively on the image in the narrow sense. Although the discourse gained the breadth of its possible applications from a universalistic anthropological concept of the image, grounding it between the “medium” and the “body,” and – derived from this positioning – in part idolatrous forms of perception and reception,<sup>12</sup> the prime refe-

**9|** C.f. Mercer, Kobena (ed.): *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers*, Cambridge/ MA: Institute of International Visual Arts/ MIT Press, 2008; id. (ed.): *Discrepant Abstraction*, Cambridge/ MA.: MIT Press, 2006.

**10|** On the methodological approaches pursued in history and culture studies, see: Conrad, Sebastian; Eckert, Andreas; Freitag, Ulrike (eds.): *Globalgeschichte: Theorien, Ansätze, Themen*, Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2007; Costa, Sérgio: *Vom Nordatlantik zum “Black Atlantic:” Postkoloniale Konfigurationen und Paradoxien transnationaler Politik*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2007; Osterhammel, Jürgen: *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Munich: Beck, 2009; Sachsenmaier, Dominic: *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World*, Cambridge: University Press, 2011. On the most recent perspectives in art history, see Falser, Michael; Juneja, Monica (eds.): *Kulturerbe und Denkmalpflege transkulturell*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2014.

**11|** On the conceptuality of aesthetic and political participation, see Rancière, Jacques: *Le partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique*, Paris: La Fabrique, 2000, engl. trans. Rockhill, Gabriel (ed.): *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London/ New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, 15. C.f. Rockhill, Gabriel; Watts, Philipp (eds.): *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, Durham/ London: Duke University Press, 2009.

**12|** Boehm, Gottfried: “Die Bilderfrage,” in: id.; Stierle, Karlheinz (eds.): *Was ist ein Bild?* Munich: Fink, 1994; Boehm, Gottfried; Mersmann, Birgit; Spies, Christian (eds.): *Movens Bild: Zwischen Evidenz und Affekt*,

rence point for the image always remained the metaphysically inflated (Christian) icon, the imitative mask, and its figural representation in painting and sculpture. Barely any consideration was given to the artifact and the transcultural context of the magic emanating from the image and their implications for colonial culture, although crucial studies already existed in this regard.<sup>13</sup> A more elaborate and broader orientation for the concept of the image was first undertaken by William J.T. Mitchell in his *What do Pictures want? The Lives and Loves of Images*: here in particular the aesthetic object and its connotations of fetish, talisman and totem were no longer viewed as ethnological special forms of insular, premodern, non-Western cultures, but rather as constructs of modern colonial discourses, the reach of which extended from the academic traditions of the concept of sculpture through to Michael Fried's "objecthood."<sup>14</sup> As quasi living things in Mitchell's conception, pictures overtly regained the enlivening power and impact once assigned to idols. He invoked their vitality, which determines and contours the agency and cognitive faculty of the subject, or indeed can go so far as to undermine its privilege to act. Taking this step, Mitchell introduced methodological concepts of the artifact shaped by the social sciences and cultural studies into the art history of Modernity – for instance the concept of "agency" already successfully established by Alfred Grell and Arjun Appadurai, which has gained broad acceptance in anthropology, sociology and cultural studies. Another crucial contribution in this context was Bruno Latour's articulation of a concept of the thing that declared the "premodern" reading of the magical in the sense of a "symmetrical anthropology" to be obsolete, stressing instead its efficacy for a critical revision of Modernity.<sup>15</sup> For art history wishing to

Munich: Fink, 2008; Belting, Hans: *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, Munich: Fink (Bild und Text), 2001; Belting, Hans: *Das echte Bild: Bildfragen als Glaubensfragen*, Munich: Beck, 2005; Stoichiță, Victor Ieronim: *L'effet Pygmalion: Pour une anthropologie historique des simulacres*, Geneva: Droz, 2008; Bredekamp, Horst: *Theorie des Bildakts*, Frankfurter Adorno-Vorlesungen 2007, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010.

**13|** Rincón, Carlos: "Magisch/ Magie," in: Barck, Karlheinz et al. (eds.): *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, Stuttgart: Metzler, 2010, vol. 3, 724-760.

**14|** C.f. Mitchell, William J. Thomas: *What do Pictures want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago/ London: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 146f. "This [Michael Fried's] division between art objects and mere, unredeemed objecthood, between art and nonart has a deep connection, I want to argue, with the rhetoric of empire and colonization."

**15|** Gell, Alfred: *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* [1997], Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998; Appadurai, Arjun (ed.): *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* [1986], Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Kopytoff, Igor: "The Cultural Biography of Things," in: Appadurai 2005, 64-91; Appadurai, Arjun: *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* [1996], Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008; Latour, Bruno: *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* [1991], engl. trans. by Evelyn Porter: *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge/ MA: Harvard University Press, 1993; id.: *Petites réflexions sur les dieux faitiches*, Paris: Édition Synthelabo, 1996. On Latour see: Nitsch, Wolfram: "Dädalus

examine transnational and translocal concepts of the image, Mitchell's approaches acted as a catalyst, bringing to bear instruments of anthropology and ethnology in the political space of the artistic present. At the same time though, they raised questions as to the spaces for such renegotiating and translating, as well as the historical processuality of transcultural concepts of the image and the medium, issues clearly remaining significant desiderata in research.<sup>16</sup>

The engagement described in Mitchell with the irrational, the affective and the sacral of pictures and their place in a modern "secular" art history are intimately tied to the current revision of the concept of fetishism. Today – following its banishment through the work of Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss<sup>17</sup> and beyond the inflationary reception, percolating down to everyday use and ordinary language, of the theses of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud on the commodity and sexual fetish, respectively – the concept of the fetish can no longer seem to be exclusively a Western fabrication conjured by the colonial imagination. Rather, its "relational" history is now traceable back to the Early Modern period in source texts and pictures. Indeed, the fetish proves to be nothing less than a key concept for establishing networked (pre-) modern aesthetic subject-object constellations, whose permeability has continually challenged the Western episteme since the Enlightenment.<sup>18</sup> In particular Charles de Brosses's introduction of the fetishism into the philosophy of religion – contemporaneous with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's momentous *Laokoon* on the genre theory of the arts – shows<sup>19</sup> that notions of the magic exuded by images had by no means been rendered obsolete by the Enlightenment. Instead, employing the instruments of psychology, ethnology and cultural anthropology, these notions now seemed graspable and controllable on the terrain of burgeoning art history and ensuing museology. The theoretical model of a material object, based on the early contacts and colonial trade in goods between Europe and West Africa, which,

und Aramis: *Latours symmetrische Anthropologie der Technik*," in: Kneer, Georg; Schroer, Markus; Schüttpeitz, Erhard (eds.): *Bruno Latours Kollektive*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2008, 219-233.

**16|** For a critique of research – largely ignoring processes of translation and transposing and thus frequently static – on the global present and its merely apparent open digital networking, including a consideration of Appadurai's work, see Falser/ Juneja 2014, 25f.

**17|** Mauss, Marcel: *Essai sur le don* [1924], engl. trans. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, London: Routledge, 1990; Lévi-Strauss, Claude: *Le totémisme aujourd'hui* [1962], engl. trans. *Totemism*, London: Penguin Books, 1969.

**18|** C.f. Rincón 2010; Böhme 2006; Antenhofer, Christina (ed.): *Fetisch als heuristische Kategorie: Geschichte – Rezeption – Interpretation*, Bielefeld: transcript (Kultur und Medientheorie), 2011; Albers, Irene; Franke, Anselm (eds.): *Animismus. Revisionen der Moderne*, Zurich: Diaphanes, 2012. A networked view on the formation of tradition is missing in Böhme and Endres, c.f. Böhme, Hartmut; Endres Johannes: "Der Fetischismus der Künste," in: Böhme/ Endres 2010, 9-31.

**19|** Brosses, Charles de: *Du culte des dieux fétiches ou parallèle de l'ancienne religion de l'Égypte avec la religion actuelle de la Nigritie*, [Paris: Fayard] 1760.

according to Carlos Rincón, “is not an image, symbol or occasional dwelling place of the divine, but pure immanence”<sup>20</sup> – i.e. a non-representational, non-referential ‘formless’ exerting a psychological effect and possessing a resistive life of its own – furnished the starting point for subsequent historically comparative concepts on the magic of images and animism. Based on, from amongst others, Edward Burnett Tylor and James George Frazer, these were diversely taken up in Modernism and are currently once again finding their way into art and culture studies.<sup>21</sup> For this reason fetishism today may be declared in retrospect to be a transcultural aesthetic category. Unlike the idol, the fetish clashes with the classical, mimetic-oriented concept of the image; the dualism between material and form was revoked through the fetish, enabling it to unfold its exceptional effect in the Enlightenment and Modernity – including beyond the usual scholarly stereotyping of fetishism as a specific “African” ritual practice.

## Four Dimensions of Renegotiation

In the described way, the fetish concept also marks out the interpretative horizon for the present publication. The essays approach this horizon in more or less explicit form – they dispute it, exploit it, or simply let it tacitly appear.

### Phenomenologies

The guiding question for the first part of this volume focuses on those specific pictorial-magical and phenomenological forms of animation and perception which are a feature of the aesthetic positioning of the “fetish” between mimetic image, material facticity and awkward inaccessibility. The starting point here is the antagonism between the mimetic image and the (formless) artifact, demonstrated since the Early Modern period in the pictorial culture of what was later described as the “Black Atlantic.”<sup>22</sup>

20| Rincón 2010, 736.

21| Tylor, Edward Burnett: *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom* [1871], 2 vols., London: John Murray, 1873; Frazer, James George: *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, abridged Edition [1922], London: Macmillan, 1954. C.f. Didi-Huberman, Georges: *Das Nachleben der Bilder: Kunstgeschichte und Phantomzeit nach Aby Warburg*, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010.

22| Initially restricted to Europe and the African west coast, colonial trade in goods and persons was the preliminary stage of the trade region defined by the slave trade that Paul Gilroy, from a perspective of a political

The essays combined under this rubric first mark out a horizon of definition for the fetish in connection with art theory and cultural practice stretching from the Early Modern period down to the present day. The individual stages lead from early illustrations in travelogues, in which the problematic of the pictorial setting of the “Fetisso” is evident for the first time, through to the partly totemic-defined pictorial ideas circulating in the context of “Negritude” (Gabriele Genge). Primarily based on German ethnology of the period, itself strongly informed by empathy psychology, an image-oriented African “will to artistic form” took hold, resulting in the development – of great consequence for the constitution of an “entangled” aesthetic Modernity – of an idea of artistic formlessness, from which the earlier dichotomy between image and fetish is detached. Devoted to popular film culture in Ghana, the following contribution extends the definitional scope of the fetish and inquires into its meaning and relevance in contemporary film (Ikem Stanley Okoye). The author describes the historical and spatial reference points of a new film language which through specific technical editing strategies reinforces the aura of the fetish. As a re-import and re-distribution of a relational “culture of perception,” fetishist concepts once again determine, this time in an altered guise, media and artistic practices. With a view to traditional Western art history, it is thus only consequential in the ensuing essay that the early phenomenological descriptive methods used in this discipline for the genre of sculpture are to be interpreted as “fetishizing” (Hans Körner). The examination of the installation practice of European portrait sculpture results here in the thesis that, already around 1905, the aesthetic-phenomenological recognition of sculpture did not pertain to the figural likeness but its facticity, perceived as “cultural-other.”

## Production of Knowledge

The second section explores the range of questions concerning the “agency” of colonial artifacts themselves, which can decisively influence the genesis of national, transnational or translocal and transcultural cultures of knowledge and remembrance. Up for renegotiation here are the processes regulating political and aesthetic participation, media practices of interaction, as well as critical engagements with media distribution and archiving and their artistic forms of perception. Collected in picture archives, Germaine Krull’s photographs of colonial artifacts in the Congo generated – as the first contribution shows – notions of economic productivity and political independence in the extraterritorial area of Free France (Kerstin Meincke) and thus equally seems to constitute this very space of political action. Already picked up by Karl Marx from Early Modern source texts, the fetishizing impact of

critique of Modernity, conceived of as the transnational cultural region of the “Black Atlantic.” Gilroy, Paul: *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London/ New York: Harvard University Press, 1993

stage-managed objects – in particular here that of an African currency – becomes a projected medium of political participation in the exiled French Résistance. That African sculpture – by means of modern reproduction technology – underwent a transformation from ethnological fetish to Western image and commodity fetish, is the starting point of the following contribution (Sylvester Ogunodun Ogbechie). The political brisance of such photographic adoptions becomes clear when the specific performance comes into focus that this visual culture, stamped by the experience of colonialism, still puts on today, in the age of global image databanks and in the context of a decolonized art history and “Bildwissenschaft” as well as their restitution claims. Drawing on the example of the national cultural heritage in Nigeria, massively reduced through colonial appropriation, these global visual transformations are problematized, in particular the influence they exert on local art history and research as well as state-run museum education. Also very radical in questioning the control mechanisms of the West’s culture of knowledge and the positions it ascribes to the subject are the works of the Afro-American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat from the 1980<sup>s</sup> and his pictorial repertoire based on what he called “facts.” As the next essay shows (Angela Stercken), Basquiat establishes different cultures of remembrance in the Black Atlantic, cultures which take up both historical and contemporary fetish concepts. A coupling with the theories of – from amongst others – Bruno Latour reveals that Basquiat’s transmedia installation practice is dominated by the idea of circulating goods and things. In the substantiating of their visually magical impact, his works transgress Western concepts of the picture as well as modern geographies of art. The dilemma of traditional genre concepts in scholarly examinations of non-Western works of art is demonstrated in the following contribution. Focusing on the exhibition “Masterworks of Mohammedan Art” staged in Munich in 1910 (Eva-Maria Troelenberg), those interferences become discernible which accompany exhibiting Islamic cultic objects in the settings of modern museum culture. Their re-staging at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century took place in recourse to concepts of the sculptural work as formulated by contemporary art history, whereby the curators hoped to tame and subdue the aesthetic dimensions resisting this type of categorization through the means of the photographic image.

### **Under the Influence of Things**

The third section takes up in many respects the subjects broached in the preceding section, illuminating now however separately the liminal phenomena between everyday culture and ritual practice which today are almost exclusively part of ethnology or cultural anthropology. Important results are generated in this context by those studies which, explicitly from an art historical perspective, are devoted to an

empirical-descriptive analysis on site and, in while doing so, draw on methods of ethnological fieldwork. The contributions gathered here revolve in particular around the question as to under which preconditions the ritual and magical impacts emanating from objects are generally graspable in art history oriented – equally in terms of lived “practice” in the broadest sense as well as aesthetic phenomenon – on the transcultural or translocal. What emerged is that the necessary critical reflection on Eurocentric concepts of Modernism/ Modernity has obstructed gaining different, extensive material-oriented accesses, a blind-spot in part stemming from the fundamental nature of the temporal, conceptual definitions and their accompanying spatial-cultural connotations. Thus, in a contribution based on the relativity of (Western) concept of Modernity (John Picton), theoretical positions are considered which, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century through to current sculptural phenomena and practices, examine the “magical activation of a thing” as a product of a cultural transfer between Africa and Europe – in other words: precisely not as a purely “non-European artistic tradition.” The discussion on the West African practice of ritual wooden sculptures is the starting and focal point of the essay “Bocio: From Nothingness to Liminality and Minimality” (Joseph Adandé): operating in the realms of the figural through to the formless, “minimalistic” artistic practice is shown conceptually to be the fetishistic practice per se since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The deliberations on its typology and history draw on travelogues in early historical contexts, but also on linguistic and etymological references which continue to contour the phenomenon down to the present day, including in terms of its aesthetic references, but which have hitherto played only a marginal role in art history. In the following contribution further insights are garnered by examining the example of Senegalese – heavily influenced by Muslim practices – visual culture around 1920, in which the indexical status (evoked in the West) of the photographic image was assigned little importance (Thomas Reinhardt). Thus, the power of blessing emanating from a photographically mediated silhouette, still venerated today, can continue to exist in artifacts made out of remotely similar and different materials: the image and the artifact are interchangeable. This way of handling a photography attributed magical powers emphatically shows the perspectives a transcultural approach can also open up for debates on the political implications of the media used. As the following essay shows, in art history those artistic contributions created in the context of the New Negro Movement are only recently seen as playing a noteworthy role which had been hitherto appreciated in terms of their political substance, but hardly due to their aesthetic dimension (Christian Kravagna). Here the author draws on the artistic works of the Pan-African movement and their affirmation of a specific “African” ritualized or ethnologized reception practice. In the film *Les Statues meurent aussi* by Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, critical of colonialism and commissioned by the journal *Présence Africaine*, African sculptural masks are turned into agents transmitting the magic of images – forging in

the process a sense of community – in the setting of modern museum space. They evoke the filmic presence of a black recipient subject, one that – itself as a subject of study, so to say – is disputed and negotiated over down to current-day music video cultures in the immediately striking re-staging of animistic pictorial traditions.

## Politics of Identity

That the strategic “enhanced evaluation” of an artifact culture connoted with the magic of images needs to be pointedly discussed in the framework of political spaces and practices (of action) is shown by the final section. Here the focus is placed on both politically-motivated strategies for occupying and presenting artifacts as well as the artistic-agitator potential of the objects themselves. To start with, the example of Brazil is called on to show that breaking with a European visual culture of Modernity for the purposes of establishing a political identity proceeds by drawing on the differentiating potential of seemingly indigenous artifact cultures (Alexandra Karentzos) – and indeed this recourse is at the same time effected by ironizing and transfiguring primitivistic interpretive patterns. Here the politics of American Minimalism are also considered, for its installative sculptural concepts were reinterpreted in adaptations by Brazilian artists. In the following essay the alternation between “African” pre-Modernism and “Western” claims of Modernity are set as the starting point to discuss techniques of ironic alienation in the works of the avant-garde artist collective *Laboratoire Agit Art* (Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff). At the conference of 2011 these were already the subject of a contemporary film essay on the Senegalese artist Joe Ouakam entitled “Der Hof.” Comparable to the self-staging of *Arte Povera* and *Fluxus*, the Senegalese artists critically dispute national arts policy in Senegal, designating their artistic work to be a “laboratory” and politically-performative experimental space. That of all things African sculpture can bestow upon a German politician an aura of expertise associated with a universal cultural mediator is the subject of the next contribution, which reveals the scope of the appropriations of artifacts in contemporary exhibitions (Melanie Ulz). The depletion of any meaning in terms of the cultural history of the artifacts and their subsequent ‘enrichment’ in a stage-managed act of national identity politics reveals the ongoing relevance of both staged “otherness” as well as the (ostensible) authenticity of ‘foreign’ things. Finally, in the following essay, the tradition of the Western figurative national monument is related to the transnational culture of remembrance in contemporary China, and thus the geographic expansion of fetishism itself comes under scrutiny (Lillian Tseng). Using the example of a ding vessel – a monumental Chinese vessel sculpture – the author poses fundamental questions as to the transfer of ritual practice and politically-motivated ascriptions beyond nation-state references, but also broaches the pro-

blematic of the non-figural icon and its identity-forming impact, beginning in the second millennium before Christ through to the exhibiting of the artifact in the New York headquarters of the United Nations.

## Global Shiftings in Media and Methods

In view of the conclusions to be drawn from the publication contributions, the concept of the fetish – as derived from its etymological tradition as “artificially produced” – proves to be an extremely suitable category for bringing together varying approaches and inlets when renegotiating what constitutes cultural alterity. A differentiated understanding of fetishism – and namely not to be taken as an unenlightened relic of pre-modern ways of life and rituals embedded in modern practices that needs to be “unmasked” – reveals its potential for research: it is to be understood rather as a lively process of interactive negotiation between subject and object positions which are philosophically and religiously informed, and as a cultural technique for animating and deepening the sense of community, for producing knowledge, or for passing on manual skills.

The special role that art history can take on in this context once again becomes clear here. As things currently stand, art history is faced with a problem: primarily – if not almost exclusively – African sculpture was confronted with the concept of the fetish and the objects enclosed by this conceptual ‘knot’ have indeed only found limited entry into the reference systems of Modernism. On the one hand, with this media-specific limitation and “geographical localization” of the fetish the discipline has designated its (pre-)colonial place of origin. On the other however, art history has nonetheless completely ignored the geographical autonomy intrinsic to the concept of the fetish, refusing to take into account the local contexts of reception of African sculpture, ascribing it instead to an imaginary “anthropological” or “aesthetic primitivism” – an ascription that has led to an ironclad definition of African art and culture under the labels of the sculptural and the fetishistic. Ipso facto this has prevented the transposing and translating of this aesthetic category to other transnational geographies and its specific conceptual elaboration.

For the vast number of disciplines devoted to culture and the humanities which are familiar with the concept of the fetish, it is characteristic that the pre-modern European-African practice of venerating a thing and its transcultural interaction has hitherto failed to be considered in terms of a shared context and thus as interconnected, viewed instead as the “African antecedent history” of the modern concept of the fetish and its subsequent “Western” rationalizations. Thus, contact and dialogue between Europe and Africa seems to have ceased from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards – and hitched to this is the colonially-informed implication that, from this point in time, fetishism persisted outside the West primarily in Africa, unchanged and without any thoughtful reflection. In contrast, in the West fetishism seemed to

have adopted new, rationalized and theoretically elaborated forms, whereby discussion of these forms continued to remain limited to European and American institutions. This misconceived adoption, stemming in large part from a neglect of other theoretical and scholarly traditions and repeatedly addressed and discussed at the 2011 conference, is also a salient point for numerous contributions collected in this volume. The insight that emerges is that the topic of research requires, along with a spatial expansion, a broadening of its historical dimension so as to identify and explore pre-colonial traditions of cultural interaction and negotiation, and further investigate the history and local embedment of ostensibly Western concepts of the image and artifact. Beyond this, it also seems crucial to continue the discussion into Modernity, a step that could first make discernible the political effectiveness of aesthetic systems and their sustainability into the present – a desideratum that remains relevant for research today.

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