

Mark Leckey, Pleasure Model (After Pietz)*



I'm discontented with homes that are rented
So I have invented my own.
Darling, this place is a lover's oasis
Where life's weary chase is unknown.
Far from the cry of the city
Where flowers pretty caress the streams
Cozy to hide in, to live side by side in,
Don't let it abide in my dreams.

Tea For Two, the tune played forever by the guests inside *The Invention of Morel*.

I. The Ideoplastic Materiality of Dumb Idols

“And thou shalt make no molten gods” - Exodus

Cinema in the Round is the name Mark Leckey gives to an uncanny personal experience of the imposing physicality of images, a sensation intensified when they start to move. The psycho-pathic sensibility he describes is reminiscent of those fever-induced deliriums experienced by children when their audio-visual and tactile senses are virally enfolded and confounded. The stubborn presence of objects close-by seems suddenly, impossibly remote, while at the same time resonating with an unbearable proximity, and unidentifiable hypnogogic figures in the far distance whisper their conversations in the depths of your ear while gigantic locomotives plough silently through platforms at the speed of clock hands. In a video document of his performance-lecture of the same name there is a striking moment when the artist appears frozen like a wax-work model, an impression enhanced by the sound of his voice speaking while the mouth remains motionless. In that instant the artist seems like a simulacra of himself, a mere thing, a temporary illustration of the text being discussed,

the maker fixed in the very stuff of his art, like an unholy sculptural fusion of Narcissus and Pygmalion. But then “it” starts to move, and we can breathe again.

Unlike the Idol however, whose nature is iconic, the fetish is essentially characterized by its irreducible materiality. But it is not the model-maker’s wax that Mark Leckey seems to be dissolving into these days but fuzzy, quantum matter. In a hallucinatory, almost psychedelic manner, like the lumps of globby, quasi-living substance that he sonically models, Mark’s stuff now oozes between the lumino-plasmics of digital screens and the molten metal and slow stone of monumental sculpture. So it is no simple matter, this heavy, interstitial and animated physicality that pre-occupies and ecstatically dematerializes the maker. It has been, since *Fiorucci Made me Hardcore*, a materiality bound to the physicality and perception of images and signs. Leckey matter is therefore not only the physical material itself but simultaneously the visual sense of pure, dumb, thingy-ness in its ungraspable but super-sensed presence. Such is the uncanny, tele-pathic, in-sensed stuff that turns the mind’s eye inside-out and reconstitutes itself as the compound photonic material of the Leckey fetish, now seeding and swarming in the infinite, proto-plasmic expanses of the long tail.

II. The Animystic Dischronicity of Origins

Enlightenment philosophers of the fetish generally identified it as a logical error in the philosophy of hypostasis: a theory about the shared nature of things spiritual and physical. For neoplatonists, beneath the surface of things present to the senses, there exist three higher or metaphysical stages of existence: the soul, the spirit (or intellect) and the One. By the time of Kant it was assumed, erroneously, that fetishism was a sub-philosophical outlook, entertained by the uncivilized, mired in sensuality, who misapprehended the imaginary demiurgic agencies informing and animating the surface characteristics and behavior of mere “things”. The Greek word for spirit was *Nous*, that faculty of mind, partaking of a divine and immortal nature, which was capable of discerning true existences from mere surface impressions. In Britain the popular, colloquial expression ‘nous’ - pronounced “nowce” - is derived from the same root as the Greek and means pretty much what it did in the streets of Athens two thousand years ago. *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* is a work of ‘nous’ in this latter and prior sense, radically re-situated in place and time, referring simultaneously to itself, its maker and their mutual making: the E’d up scally nowce of a self-made maker, making self-identifying art from the ready-made sign-things that mark out those who have the subcultural smarts to know and those who don’t, the canny maker and his work already made by the already ready-made.

Likewise, but differently, Mark’s meeting with Felix, there where the tale of the cartoon cat in *The Long Tail* begins for its re-maker. Two precise and distinct times coincide and coalesce, fused now forever: one definable moment in history when a certain photograph of a Felix doll was taken in front of a mechanical scanner at the NBC studios in New York, 1929, and another, when the artist, searching the internet for images of “dolls, puppets or automata”, found, and finds himself again and again, face-to-face with the as-yet-not, but already de- and re-materialized Felix, a remediated phantasm of its own origins endlessly repeating its loopy convolutions and “core-doll” anagrammatics. Felix, the

discarnate emissary and radiant messenger of broadcast tele-vision, now sits, stands, leaps and bounds in the long tail that it precipitated, hand-in-discarnate-hand with Mark Leckey, the artist, who first conceived their co-joined spectral apotheosis, one day in 2007. As with *Fiorucci*, Mark's ecstatic vision of the long tail, despite being a record of an ego forging itself into transcendence, is also a performance of its delirious abduction and ecstatic obliteration, preserved for all time in the sentient record of all recordings.

III. The Enigma of Worth

Throughout *Fiorucci* there is a siren-like refrain, the trifling fragment of an obsessively valued piece of commercial pop soul, which would have been lost without trace, were it not for the collective, resurrective desire of die-hard soullies, keeping their faith in the north of England, transubstantiated into the soundtrack of a bricolaged work of art in 1999: the opening chimes of 'I'll be There', massive at Wigan Casino and the Blackpool Mecca back in '73, recorded in 1967 by the New York girl-group The Gems.

A recurrent theme in accounts of trade between Portuguese and African merchants between the 15th and 17th century was the perceived irrationality of the latter's economic reasoning. The contemporary meaning of fetishism was constructed in the inter-cultural matrix of this long historical encounter between two alien cultures with ostensibly irreconcilable modes of evaluating worth. A thousand years of neoplatonic Christian theology had transmuted the Roman term *facticius* - used to identify 'man-made' rather than 'natural' goods - into *fetiço*, evolved to mean "false sacraments", magical amulets and man-made objects of idolatry and witchcraft. It was this latter term that Portuguese merchants brought with them to Africa and used to make sense of their new trading relationships. Like a child in a sweet shop, or an occultist in a crystal warehouse, Africans, it was believed, could make a God out of the first thing they encountered, and abandon it just as easily. Their lack of a standard measure by which a thing's worth could be calculated led Europeans to assume that African's imagined capricious equivalences between otherwise incommensurable things: like sticks and stones, gods and bones, trophies and trivia. The aesthetic philosophers of the Enlightenment, familiar with the recently coined theory of fetishism - forged on the Gold and Ivory coasts by God-fearing and clearly-calculating white Europeans - began referring to the ultimate degradation of beauty, that which has no part of the Sublime, as *läppisch* or 'trifling', a word for things whose value is woefully over-determined by those whose reason is clouded by the nebulous dazzlement of trinkets and trifles, to which they become blindly and irrationally attached.

From *Fiorucci* to Felix, Mark Leckey's work traverses the spectrum of cultural values from the most base to the most elevated. Of the trans-valuative powers of the long tail he tells us, chanting the alchemical mantra of Baphomet - Satanic, pagan idol of the Knights Templar, alchemists and 19th century occultists - "So above, so below. So above, so below. So above, so below".

III. Triple X Transducer

The Invention of Morel, the 1940 novella by Adolfo Bioy Casares, contains a fictional machine that is a tragic phantasmatic precursor of Mark's long tail, a device that makes four-dimensional recordings of people and their surroundings, its files replayed automatically and eternally by an engine driven by the pulse of tides. Inside the pages of *The Invention* a fugitive, marooned on the island where the device is installed, falls in love with a mysterious and unusually taciturn woman called Faustine, who returns to the same spot on the island everyday to read her book and gaze at the sea. On discovering that his muse is only the simulacral recording of a once living being - captured, stored and made endlessly re-playable by her unrequited suitor Morel - the Fugitive decides to have himself reproduced by the same machine, so that their imperishable doubles can haunt the island, forever together, side-by-side.

But Mark's Ur-machine, the primary pleasure model as it were, seems to be neither Fiorucci nor Felix, but Duchamp's Large Glass. Translucent diagram of impersonal desire, archetypal bachelor machine and future-art engine, it was perhaps the first organ-object and art-thing to strike the artist's fancy in a destiny-shaping way: the primary locus of a paradoxically hyper-personal yet social-machinic rhetoric of the hope for art. In many ways Mark's Felix is like the Fugitive's Faustine. But much more he is a tulpa, familiar spirit, or shamanic animal guide, leading Mark through the Large Glass, down the rabbit hole of the long tail, to meet the humming swarm of torrents that will un-man him, dematerialize and re-make him in torrential new flesh. Through Felix Mark seems to be reverse engineering pre- and post-modern versions of the fetish, de-reifying it, returning the *anima* to animation and the ghost to the machine. Mechanical scanner, computer terminal, sonic oscillator, toggle switch, torrent file, snare drum, orgone accumulator, automaton, multi-plane camera, chocolate grinder, and clockwork orange: all now signifying soul machines co-joined in a cosmic, cyberdelic and techno-animystic rapture.

“The swarm begins to hum again, and it is humming the song of myself and once more I am assumed by the swarm, made manifest in its multitude. I become transcendent in the swarm, I am of the swarm, I am the swarm...and the swarm is me”

Mark Leckey from inside *The Long Tail*

*Between 1985 and 1988 the independent scholar and Green Party activist William Pietz published a highly-influential, three-part essay on ‘The Problem of the Fetish’, arguing that its modern conception, despite its diverse theoretical and discursive formulations, has four continuous characteristics: i) Irreducible Materiality, ii) Repetition of Singular Historical Origins, iii) The Mystery of Socially Dependent Value and iv) the active relationship of the object to an individual's body. The text here is structured in terms of these four defining characteristics, reflected upon in relation to several of Mark Leckey's works.